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SERMONS,

AND OTHER

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES,

BY THE LATE

HENRY HUNTER, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE SCOTS CHURCH, LONDON WALL.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED,

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF HIS LIFE,

AND

A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF HIS WRITINGS.

66953

"No farther seek his merits to disclose,
"Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
"There they alike in trembling hope repose
"The bosom of his Father and his God."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE Author has nothing to add to his former observations on the subject of the present work, beyond the very sincere hope that the Volumes now offered may prove as acceptable to the Publick as the Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of the Eighteenth Century: which he flatters himself will be the case, on reflecting that they contain many long-forgotten and most curious articles of information, derived from various authorities, and from one of the most antient and valuable sources in the British Metropolis—the Library of Sion College: the President, Governors, and Librarian of which deserve the highest praise, for their liberal indulgence to

J. P. MALCOLM.

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THE RECIPROCAL DUTIES OF A MINISTER AND HIS PEOPLE.

DELIVERED AT THE ADMISSION OF A MINISTER.

CHRISTIANITY has been long enough in the world to see its ministers in all the variety of situation, which the passions, the prejudices, and the interests of mankind can suggest and impose.—It has fared with the servants, as it did with the master—on whom the multitude would one day obtrude the regal honours and dignity, and the next, drag out to the punishment of a slave. The world has preserved no medium in this—but according to the prevailing humour of the time and place, has elevated men of the ministerial profession to the highest pinnacle of

wealth and power, ranked them among, sometimes above, the gods of the earth, or pursued them into corners, loaded them with reproach, and accounted them as the "filth of the world, "and the offscouring of all things."——It has been our lot, to exist in the age of senseless, insipid, profligate infidelity—Unbelievers of other times were men of learning, of philosophic acuteness, some of them men of virtue—they thought it necessary to employ what had at least the semblance of reason and argument, against the gospel—but the unbelievers of to-day save themselves a great deal of labour on this subject, and successfully oppose to all that can be written or spoken in defence of revealed religion, the irresistible arguments of a loud laugh, a hard heart, a stupid head, and a dissolute life. One great advantage results from this state of things—the ministers of the gospel are relieved from the necessity of employing what talents they have, in defending the outworks of religion, and thereby enjoy full leisure, if they be disposed to improve it, for attending to its internal polity, and securing, or even extending, its frontier. We are, through the blessing of providence, men, brethren, and fathers, left at perfect liberty to do, and to receive, as much benefit by the gospel of Jesus as we can—we are happily placed in that

state, wherein little is to be either feared or hoped from without, where ambition has no object, and where, unless through our own fault, neither contempt nor malice can reach us. Happy, thrice happy, did we but know our own felicity.

You are sufficiently acquainted, my friends, with the intention of this day's meeting. This is one of the few opportunities which occur of suggesting more particular and more important hints respecting the reciprocal affections and duties of the christian priesthood, and the "church "of Christ committed to them"—an office both delicate and difficult, but which, notwithstanding, I undertake with all cheerfulness, because my heart assures me, that in addressing the people, it is the reverse of my intention to magnify my order in their eyes, or to bespeak, much less to exact, an improper respect toward it; and that in speaking of the character and conduct of ministers, I have no insolent ambition to instruct others, but an earnest desire to impress my heart with a deep sense of my own duty. I could therefore wish it supposed that in the exhortations to be delivered, in so far as they are founded upon, and agreeable to, the word of God, not I, but the great apostle of the Gentiles is speaking unto you.

His advices to the Thessalonian church, and through it to the churches of Christ in every age and place of the world, are addressed to the people more directly, to their ministers in an oblique manner—yet, at the same time, with clearness and perspicuity. Let us attend to them in the order wherein they are laid down in the text—and may God give us understanding in all things, that we may know, and speak, and do his will.

Observe, I pray you, the modesty, the meekness, which accompany the fervour of Paul's address. Where is the stately assumption of the apostolical dignity and authority—where the pontifical haughtiness and distance? Paul knew nothing about them. "We beseech you, brethren," is his humble, gentle language; but perhaps he is asking some boon for himself, that he is thus submissive and condescending—no such thing—there is not one word or hint about himself in the whole address. The only favour he has to ask is, that they would study their own honour and happiness, and the edification of the body of Christ. His

First request to the people is, that they "would know them who laboured among them," that is to say, acquaint themselves with their

persons, doctrine, manner of life; enter with attention and kindness into their situations and concerns. There are some men who put in practice this injunction of the apostle in a manner very different from his meaning; who, under the influence of an insatiable curiosity, or a still worse principle, follow their ministers into every corner, the sanctuary of their own house not excepted; watch every motion, scan every action, ready to make a man an offender for a word—who affect to shew them kindness, give them a place at their tables, with the same view that Simon the pharisee invited Jesus to his house, to have an object of observation and censure. The whole wisdom of the serpent, added to the harmlessness of the dove, is scarcely sufficient to secure one against the pernicious designs of these cunning men. Unless your knowledge of them who labour among you in the gospel be directed and governed by the law of kindness, it will stop too soon, or be prosecuted too far, or degenerate into inquisitiveness and impertinence. It is your unquestionable and unalienable privilege to enquire into, and to satisfy yourselves concerning your minister's character, and the matter of his preaching, and the conformity of both to the unerring standard—the written word. You have a full claim of access to his person, to an interest in

his sympathy, in his prayers—his advice, his assistance, as often as your circumstances require, and your hearts incline you to apply to him for any of these purposes. In return, you must not think it much, if he put in a silent claim upon your humanity, upon your attention to his secular, his domestic concerns. Decency, delicacy, and considerations of a still higher kind, forbid him to express eagerness and anxiety on this article; he has, generally speaking, but one source of subsistence. With the advantage which liberal education would give to the usual run of abilities, toward rising in the world, he has voluntarily resigned the gainful walks of life, he reposes himself on the care of the Master whom he serves, and the generosity of the people to whom he ministers, as the only means of provision for himself and family; your knowledge of him in this respect therefore should be zealous, active, effectual—should outrun not only his necessities, but, as far as possible, his very wishes. Nor is this more your duty, than it is your interest; for believe me, a mind loaded with poverty, and distracted with care, is incapable of attaining that freedom, that boldness, that fervor, or that intrepidity which are necessary to a profitable discharge of the duties of the ministerial function. But there is another thing, under this head, which

I must take the liberty in the most earnest manner to recommend, namely, a heart-felt, an experimental knowledge of the all important truths which are delivered unto you. Without this, all the intelligence you have employed in calling and choosing a minister, all the notional knowledge you may acquire by sitting under his ministry, and all the obliging, affectionate, and liberal knowledge you may take of his circumstances, will avail you nothing. I have known men discover both zeal and understanding in the election of gospel ministers, who cheerfully employed their time, their influence, their tongues and pens, nay, their money, in order to obtain able and faithful pastors; but who, after they had carried their point, sat down satisfied with their success, without once thinking of turning it to any good account; like wanton sportsmen, whose delight consists in running down the game with much danger and fatigue, but who leave the repast it affords to be enjoyed by others. This day is an era of considerable consequence in the lives of some among you—you will long remember, and probably sometimes mention, the active part you have taken in accomplishing this good work, but it will be good to you only as it is followed up—all that hath hitherto been done is mere preparation. Let me there-

fore beseech you, by the tender mercies of God, and by the life of your precious souls; by the meltings of friendship, and by the hope of heaven, let me beseech you to know him whom God hath now sent to labour among you, as the messenger of peace and salvation, as come to you on a business of more than life and death—a business of eternal moment—to call you out of the vanity of time, to the contemplation, the pursuit, the possession of "an inheritance incorruptible, "undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Were this place less public, and this assembly less mixed, I would give farther vent to the overflowings of my heart; but I must restrain myself; I must cease from a subject which overpowers me; I must fly from the thought that persons amiable and excellent in so many important respects, will continue deliberately destitute of the chief excellency, the most attractive loveliness, of their nature; that those who mind all things else so well, will neglect only, "the one thing needful." The apostle's

Second request to christian churches, respecting their conduct to their ministers, is "to "esteem them very highly in love for their "works' sake." Be not alarmed, my friends, at this forcible and expressive language of the apo-

stle, as if he meant to make an idol of the christian priesthood; as if he wanted you to yield it an implicit esteem and love; as if he would have you to hold men's persons in admiration: their work and usefulness must be the rule and measure of your affection to them. There is, perhaps, little occasion to throw in this caution: these are not the times, nor is this the land, of deifying priests, and of erecting altars to Paul's, and Apollos's, and Cephas's; it is well with modern apostles if they can obtain ordinary attention and respect. There is one thing, however, which I cannot but observe here, the difference of Paul's spirit and temper from those which govern many who are engaged in the same work with him. Nothing can be a greater contrast than the largeness, the liberality of his mind, and the selfish narrowness of theirs. This is not the only place in his writings, where we find him expressing perfect satisfaction in that share of fame, of approbation, of esteem, which his fellow labourers obtained. Abhorred be the thought of confining the gospel of Christ, or any of its effects or emoluments, to any sect, party, or name, to the muddy walls of any house, consecrated or unconsecrated. God knows, there is work enough for us all, and encouragement enough for us all,

how many soever we be. Let us only be found doing our duty, and there is no fear that we miss our reward.

But to return to the apostle's exhortation: "Esteem them very highly in love for their works' "sake." This plainly supposes acquaintance with them, and regular attendance upon their ministrations. Love in this, as well as in other instances, is often conceived at first sight; may be the effect of a single glance; it exists, but it is impossible to tell whence it came, or whither it goes; but esteem is the fruit of intimacy and attention; it is cool and dispassionate; it flies not hastily to the embraces of a stranger, but it cannot be torn from the bosom of a friend; but still it is an affection too cold and inanimated to form of itself the perfection of this pleasing union. The approbation of the understanding, be it ever so clear and full, will never satisfy, if the more tender emotions of the heart be restrained; the apostle therefore urges his suit farther than esteem, farther than even the highest degree of it; he solicits in behalf of his brethren in the ministry, that esteem of them be crowned with love. He knew that if this affection, thus founded, could once be engaged in their favour, their mu-

tual happiness would be complete; that an union of interests, of views, of pursuits, of attainments, would constitute a fulness of joy. Let Paul still plead for his fellow-labourers—they have need of all his intercession—you have an undoubted right to examine the claim that is laid to your esteem and love, nay, it becomes you to be nicely scrupulous in your inquiries. If a person pretend a regard for us, and proffer a particular service to us, we are disposed, nay, in a manner, constrained to think well of him in the first instance, for we can hardly think ill of another, merely for thinking well of us; but before we give credit to his professions, or accept his services, it is natural, and it is fit to inquire into the motives by which he may be actuated, and the ends he may probably have in view—if these apparently issue from, and end in self, we are fully warranted to hesitate, to suspect, to reject—if they have a more benevolent and disinterested aspect, though we may see proper to reject, we frankly bestow our approbation, and acknowledgments; but if such a person advance a formal claim to our affections and good offices, we are then called upon to ask in plain terms: "On what pretence dost thou thus?" To apply to the instance before us—the ministers of the gospel, in

as far as they resemble Paul, do not pretend to your favour, on the presumption of an inherent dignity in their order, "For we preach not our-"selves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves "your servants for Jesus' sake"—nor yet on personal accomplishments, whether natural or acquired: "What things were gain" to Paul, in this respect, those he counted loss for Christ—nor as having dominion over you, for we would not be "lords over God's heritage, but rather "ensamples to the flock." Our simple plea is, we love you, we wish you well, we wish well to your dearest, best interests—we wish to "im-"part unto you spiritual gifts, to the end you "may be established,"—If you find it otherwise, if you find the fleece, not the flock, to be our object, that we seek not you, but yours, despise, reject us, as a woman of sensibility and spirit would a sordid suitor, whom she discovered to be attached to her fortune, not her person, or to the latter chiefly for the sake of the former. By this test we are contented to stand or fall.—If it be asked, Are not the ministers of the gospel liable to many imperfections in common with other men? it is readily admitted, they are "men of like passions with yourselves."—Are they not justly chargeable with many faults in temper,

many errors in conduct? Let it be with sorrow acknowledged; but still permit us to plead, that we bring you that gospel which is calculated to make both ourselves and you wiser and better—that gospel whose native tendency it is to purify, to exalt, to perfect our nature—that gospel which is the endearing bond of union between saints on earth, and the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven.—"We beseech you therefore, bre-"thren, to know them which labour among you, "and are over you in the Lord, and admonish "you, and to esteem them very highly in love "for their works' sake," and love will cover a multitude of sins, for "charity suffereth long, "and is kind; charity envieth not; charity "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth "not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her "own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil, "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the "truth; beareth all things; believeth all things; "hopeth all things; endureth all things*."

3. The apostle prefers a third request to the church of the Thessalonians, respecting their behaviour one to another, "And be at peace "among yourselves." He had commended them highly on this very account, a little before,

* 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

"But as touching brotherly love, ye need not "that I write unto you; for ye yourselves are "taught of God to love one another. And in- "deed ye do it towards all the brethren, which "are in all Macedonia.*" But it is a duty which cannot be too often inculcated, a temper which cannot be too warmly recommended—Christ himself gives it as his special commandment, and lays it down as the distinguishing badge of his disciples: "A new commandment "I give unto you, that ye love one another; as "I have loved you, that ye also love one ano- "ther. By this shall all men know that ye are "my disciples, if ye have love one to another†." Paul, therefore, the servant of Christ, earnestly and repeatedly presses it in all his epistles to all the churches. It would lead me far beyond the proper bounds of a discourse, to enter into a minute discussion of this subject. The importance of the apostolic injunction is obvious—it were absurd to go about to prove it. I shall satisfy myself with suggesting a few things which tend to disturb the peace of christian society, that you may be warned to avoid them, and with mentioning a few considerations, attention to which may be the means of preserving and promoting peace among yourselves.

* 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10. † St. John xiv. 34, 35.

The little jealousies and rivalships of private life, are one great source of discord among christian men and women—the times we live in will not admit of one part of the practice of primitive christians, as it is described, "Neither was there "any among them that lacked: for as many as "were possessors of lands or houses sold them, "and brought the prices of the things that were "sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: "and distribution was made unto every man ac- "cording as he had need*." The usual distinctions of providence in the distribution of external things must now affect christians in common with other men; christianity now does its work, not by levelling the fortunes, but the tempers of men. When the great and affluent are taught by it to be humble and condescending, and ready to communicate—and the poor to be content, and patient, and acquiescing, the equality of mankind is preserved more effectually, than if the whole goods of the community were thrown into a common stock, and an equal distribution made among the individuals; but the mischief is, the spirit of the gospel in this matter is too little felt and understood by many of its professors; they enter too much into the spirit of the world, and, what is worst of all, introduce it into

* Acts iv. 34, 35

the house of God, and mingle it with their very devotion. One may have seen an insignificant article of dress or equipage fill one breast with insolence and pride, and another with jealousy and envy; and, strange to tell, the temple is not seldom chosen as the field for exercising these unworthy, contemptible, antichristian passions.

Violent attachments to particular men are another cause of dissension in christian society. This began very early in the church, and gave occasion of severe reproof and useful admonition to the over-zealous partizans, "For ye are yet "carnal; for whereas there is among you envy- "ing, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, "and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of "Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not "carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apol- "los, but ministers by whom ye believed, even "as the Lord gave to every man*?" "For i "hath been declared unto me of you, my bre "thren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, "that there are contentions among you. Now "this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of "Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I "of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul cru- "cified for you? or were ye baptized in the

* 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4, 5.

"name of Paul*? It is natural, nay commendable, to be attached to one who has been eminently beneficial to us, but we are not thereby warranted, surely, to erect a standard for him, and to quarrel with every one who refuses to run to it—if we value the enjoyment of our liberty, we must leave others also in the full possession of theirs. And if it be duly considered, that the most useful minister is, at best, a mere instrument in the hand of God, to differ with passion on this head will be found not only idle but sinful.

A turn for argument and disputation is frequently a great disturber of concord—one man who possesses this unhappy disposition has often been the means of setting a numerous community at variance. And it happens very unfortunately, that this is not seldom the fault of intelligent, useful, respectable men; they are not aware, however, that though this may be perhaps the way of obtaining the fame of knowledge and sagacity, it is very far from being the way to preserve their respectability, or extend their usefulness—for the disputer generally makes as many real enemies, as he irritates or overcomes persons in argument, and if we compare the numbers of

* 1 Cor. i. 11, 12, 13.

the provoked, with those of the convinced upon such occasions, it will be found that with all his powers of reason and eloquence, the odds are more than ninety-nine out of one hundred against him. I say nothing here of those pests to society, the disputatious *fools* in every branch of science, with which the world abounds; but I would advise every person I wish well, as he values his ears, his understanding, and his temper, when such an one enters, immediately to take leave of the company.

The considerations which recommend peace are so plain and so striking, that they need but to be mentioned. If likeness be a reason of union, who should be so united as persons, whose features so affectingly resemble each other —what in nature so like as one miserable, mortal, guilty creature to another, one weak, capricious, perverse human being to another? Would to God, we could discover in each other more pleasing lines of resemblance, and were more disposed to look for them—are we not called in "one hope of our calling? Have we not one "Lord, one faith, one baptism? Is there not "one God and father of all, who is above all, "and through all, and in us all?"—"Do we not "together hope to come at length, in the unity "of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son

" of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure " of the stature of the fulness of Christ*?" I cannot conclude this part of my address to the people, without offering the just tribute of praise to you, my friends, of this congregation, for your wise and christian conduct in the observance of this gospel precept—you have kept together in a critical situation, and God has been pleased to reward your harmony with increase—you have united in the choice of a pastor; you have in him another common object of attention and bond of affection; you worship your common Lord in the same place—you are accustomed to see one anothers faces every returning Lord's day—these, it is confessed, are inferior considerations; but they often strike the mind and attract the heart, when those of a higher nature are out of sight.—" If " it be possible then, as much as lieth in you, " live peaceably with all men†."—" Walk honest- " ly to them that are without—and be at peace " among yourselves."

II. I now proceed briefly to consider the hints suggested by Paul to Christian Ministers, respecting their station and conduct in the church of Christ; and here, as before, I shall endeavour to follow the order of the text, again imploring

* Eph. iv. 13. † Rom. xii. 18.

the candour of my fathers and brethren in believing, that mere accident of situation, not arrogance of design, has led me this day, thus publicly, to speak of their and my own duty.—And in the

First place, our office, my brethren, is represented, as a *labouring* in the church of Christ: "We beseech you to know them who labour "among you." It is one of the many vulgar errors concerning the duty and office of a minister, that it is a very easy and commodious employment. Comparisons are made between its ostensible labours, and those of other liberal and mechanical professions, greatly in our favour, in point of leisure and indulgence. This conclusion is the effect of the grossest ignorance. Ah! little does the world know the thousand heart-aches and mortifications, the mental agonies and convulsions, to which a minister's occupation necessarily exposes him—beyond description more intolerable than the acutest pains which the body can suffer. The miseries of the wretched in which he cannot but sympathize—the scorn of the proud, which he cannot escape—the intrusions of the impertinent, whom he must not exclude—the caprice of the [illegible]rd, to which he must submit. "The spurn[illegible]ch patient merit

" of the unworthy takes"—the bitter conflict betwixt a generous mind, and a contracted fortune—the cruel necessity of wearing a smiling face, with an anguished heart. Happy, many a time, to fly to the labours of the seventh day, as a refuge from the woes of the other six—if this be a just representation of the case, and they only can tell who have experienced it, then the labour of a minister, instead of being likened to that of the mechanic at his anvil, or the galley slave at his oar, resembles more nearly the pangs of a woman in travail; with this discouraging difference still against him, that while she is supported with the hope of immediate relief, and an ample recompence, he is racked with suspense, and at last rewarded with disappointment. So various, indeed, and so complicated are a minister's labours, both active and passive, that, but for one consideration, reflection upon them would issue in absolute despair. The work is not our own, but God's—He who hath sent us to teach, and to baptize, hath likewise said, " Lo, I am " with you alway, even to the end of the world;" —therefore " we so run, not as uncertainly, so " fight we, not as one that beateth the air;"— and having " finished our course and kept the " faith"—we can with trembling hope look to " a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the

" righteous Judge, shall give unto all them that
" love his appearing."

Thus animated, my brethren and fathers, let us labour more abundantly. Have we to labour among the ignorant? Our Redeemer is " the co-
" venant of the people, to open the eyes of the
" blind." Among " the stout-hearted, and such
" as are far from righteousness?"—" The word of
" the Lord is as a fire, and like a hammer that
" breaketh the rock in pieces." Among " the
" wandering and such as are out of the way?—
" He is faithful who hath promised." " With great
" mercies will I gather thee;" " the Lord doth
" build up Jerusalem, he gathereth together the
" outcasts of Israel." Among the afflicted? " the
" comforter, the Holy Ghost," is now given, for Christ is now glorified. Among the mourners in Zion? the tempted of Satan? the prisoners of fear? Know you not, that " Jesus is anointed to
" preach good tidings to the meek, to bind up
" the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the
" captives, and the opening of the prison to them
" that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable
" year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of
" our God, to comfort all that mourn; to ap-
" point unto them that mourn in Zion, to give
" unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for

" mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit " of heaviness; that they might be called trees of " righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that " he might be glorified*." Is our work great, our strength small, are our difficulties many? and can we not trust in the gracious word of the great captain of salvation? " Fear not, for I am " with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: " I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; " yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of " my righteousness. Behold, all they that were " incensed against thee shall be ashamed and " confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they " that strive with thee shall perish†." Our best intended and most painful services may be misunderstood, misrepresented, neglected by men, perhaps be requited with hatred and reproach; " ne- " vertheless, let us, my beloved brethren, be " stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the " work of the Lord; for so much as we know that " our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

In the second place, our station in the church of Christ, is described as being *over* our people *in* the Lord. A pre-eminence both dangerous and painful: a pre-eminence little calculated to inflame our pride, but very much so to alarm our fears, and

* Isa. lxi. 1, 2, 3. † Ibid. xli. 10, 11.

to engage our deepest attention, and to put in motion all our active powers. To be *over* the people is to lead the way in every duty, to stand in the front rank in every danger, to watch over them when they go to rest, to warn them of every approach of the foe, every visit of the chief captain—to check the forward, to incite the lingerers, to recal the devious, to encourage the fearful, to help the weak, to tend the sick, to sooth the dying. But this is not all—we are over them in all these difficult and dangerous respects, not only in things of a spiritual nature, but *in* the Lord—responsible not to them only, but to the great Judge of all—we "watch for their "souls, as they that must give account." What an awful and affecting situation this! my friends! —arduous station indeed! to stand betwixt two parties, whose wills are often so contradictory, whose views are so different, whose expectations from us are so opposite, that to obey the one is to offend the other, that to be approved of the one is to be condemned of the other—to arm the whole enmity of the human heart against ourselves on the one hand, or have the blood of souls required at our hands on the other—to be hated of men, or rejected of God. When we think of this, must we not sensibly feel, what need of wisdom we have, yea what zeal, yea

what boldness, yea what meekness and patience, yea what undaunted resolution, yea what elevation above the world, yea what converse with heaven? Who that considers the worth of a soul, the vast import of heaven and hell—the majesty of a holy and righteous God, would venture to be a minister? Who that loves mankind, is ambitious of shining among the sons of light, wishes the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, believes and trusts in the grace of the God of Mercy, would not aspire after a station, whose difficulty is more than compensated by the aid that is promised, whose danger is lost in the glory which is to follow?—In the

Third and last place, A minister's duty is described, as consisting in admonishing the people —" we beseech you to know them which admo- " nish you."—This is a word of gentle import, and seems designed to regulate both the matter and manner of our addresses to the people.— They are to be reminded from time to time of the great truths of the gospel, whose intrinsic importance and intimate relation to us are such, that the gentlest hint is sufficient to engage a thinking mind in the serious consideration of them—the servant of the Lord must not strive, must not assume airs of authority, must not mag-

nify himself. The art of persuasion is his safest, surest weapon. The advice which is obtruded upon us in a magisterial tone, we find ourselves generally disposed to repel, which administered with mildness and condescension, we would have listened to and followed. It is often necessary to reprove—and of all the parts of a friend's and of a minister's duty this is surely the most delicate, and the most difficult. There is a sort of men who value themselves on their bluntness in reproving—they are some of them very honest, but they generally discover too much of an inclination to gratify their own humour, to obtain the goodwill, or the amendment, of the party reproved. A reproof which is concluded with such words as these; "You may do as you will, I "have done my duty, I have delivered my own "soul," seldom does any good; the matter is wholly marred by the manner. The person I would wish to reform must not be galled, must not be exposed, must not be allowed to suspect that I have any other object in view but his good—by observing an opposite conduct, the reprover, without gaining any thing, will probably lose not only his friend, but what is infinitely worse, his friend's return to virtue. Admonitions from the pulpit should never be so particular as to point out an individual—private admonitions

should be so private, that as in giving alms, our left hand should not know what our right hand doth.

May all of us—pastors and people, be "taught "of God, from the least to the greatest, made "wise to salvation," and, "when the chief Shep- "herd shall appear, may we receive together a "crown of glory that fadeth not away." Amen and Amen.

SERMON XIX.

TITUS ii. 15.

Let no man despise thee.

ON THE MINISTERIAL CHARACTER.

AT THE ADMISSION OF A MINISTER.

THE office of a minister of the gospel is, in itself, worthy of all respect and honour; and that it is not always treated with sentiments of this kind, must surely be owing to the conduct and character of those who exercise it. To preserve or recover the importance and dignity which become the pastoral office, and to rescue it from that slight and insult which are too frequently poured upon it, is unquestionably an object well worth the attention of every honest clergyman; is a duty we owe to our great Lord and Master, to ourselves, to our flocks, and to the church of which we are members. The best and most effectual means for accomplishing this valuable end, is frequently, seriously, practically to consider the nature and design of our office, that we are

set up for the sake of other men, not for our own; that it is our business to be useful to our fellow creatures, not to pursue our own private interest, at least to seek the latter only through the former.—With this in our view, and a practice conformed to it, we shall assuredly stand sufficiently guarded both from ridicule and contempt.

The apostle, at the 12th and following verses, points out to his pupil and son in the faith of Jesus, the native tendency of the gospel, as "teaching us to deny ungodliness and worldly "lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly "in this present world;" and this, enforced by the powerful motives of a future judgment, the example and the atonement of Jesus Christ. "These things," says he, at the 16th verse, "speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authori-"ty." To which he adds, with an emphatical solemnity, "Let no man despise thee;" that is, give no man just ground of doing so—an injunction which is written for our sakes likewise, that we also may be "strong in the grace that is in "Christ Jesus;" that we also should be "blame-"less as the stewards of God."

In discoursing from these words, I propose, through the divine assistance, in the

First place, To point out some of the more obvious sources from which disregard and contempt of the clergy usually proceed.

II. I shall endeavour to point out, what I take to be the most probable means of escaping treatment of this kind.

1. I begin with pointing out some of the more obvious sources from which disregard and contempt of the clergy usually proceed: and here, what must necessarily occupy the

First place, is immorality. Vice in any character is odious, but in a clergyman it is detestable, it is monstrous. It raises the indignation and contempt of mankind in general, to observe men of immoral lives putting on appearances, and assuming stations and offices, which infer strictness and sanctity—the professed libertine in the common estimation is not so despicable as the unholy devotee. There is one consideration which merits our regard—the world is much more watchful over our conduct than over that of any other class of men; errors and miscarriages in us make a deep impression, especially if they are unexpected.—The detection of an impostor always produces a degree of satisfaction, of malici-

ous pleasure, which is ever accompanied with disdain, with abhorrence: men give no quarter to such a character, they make no allowance for it. And is not an immoral clergyman the worst, the vilest of impostors, who veils or supports vice, by the most respectable of names, the most honourable of professions? Is it possible for a person of this character to be in the smallest degree useful as a minister? How oddly will lessons of virtue and religion sound in the mouth of such an one? With what contempt will the most ordinary hearer be filled, when reproof, or exhortation to duty, is administered to him by one who evidently has no sense of his own, either as a christian or as a minister.

Would to God, it were improper to suppose a Minister of Jesus should be grossly immoral! Perhaps at present it is improper. I shall only add, therefore, that wherever such a character may appear, the world, bad as it is, will give its testimony against the offender; for even they who love vice themselves, commonly express the utmost contempt of those, whose station and profession are supposed to imply decency, dignity, and purity of manners, if they shall venture to take their share in the prevailing follies and vices of the age.

A second and a plentiful source of contempt, and nearly allied to the former, is imprudence—by which I mean, negligence of character, going out of the way, and using improper freedoms with the world. The greatest care and circumspection are necessary, in order to preserve that blamelessness of character which is so essential to our office. If a minister's good name is once blown upon, all is over—error is magnified into vice, inconsiderateness into design, oversight into obstinacy. We read of a noble Roman who repudiated his wife upon a slight surmise—because, as he alleged, the wife of Cesar should not be so much as suspected. The obligation upon ministers to be jealous of their reputation, is, I apprehend, equally binding: they have the very same reason to avoid cause even of suspicion, to abstain not only from evil, but from the very appearance of it; because, as in the case now mentioned, to be suspected, is to be guilty.

I would further observe under this head, that there is, unhappily for people of our profession, a set of men in the world, of the higher stations in life, no friends to the cause of religion and virtue, who affect the company and conversation of clergymen, and caress them highly for qualities that have no sort of connection with their office.

By which marks of deceitful favour they are unwarily betrayed to go lengths highly unbecoming their profession, and indeed unbecoming any character, any profession. Hence it comes to pass, that their tempters are hardened in their own levity and wickedness; religion is brought into disrepute; the serious and good are offended —and the unhappy victims themselves are not seldom rewarded in the end with slight and ridicule from their betrayers, after they have lost, long before, the love and esteem of the sober and wise. This surely should teach us to be on our guard against the smiles, the allurements of such flatterers, to spurn with indignation their praises, their caresses. A mortal weapon lurks under them. To accept of sordid incense even for clerical good qualities, is unworthy a minister of the gospel, how much more for qualities of which a minister ought to be ashamed. It is impossible to conceive a readier way to be despised, than such a conduct, to be despised at all hands—would we avoid such a requital, let us boldly stand out at the beginning.—"Resist the devil, "and he will flee from you," is the advice of an inspired apostle—in like manner let us refuse compliance with wicked men, and they will soon cease their solicitations.—I join together under one head, a

[illegible] and fourth source of contempt, as from [illegible] are they are involved together—and [illegible] servility in courting popular favour, [illegible] haughtiness in despising the people. Nothing can be more contemptible than either of these extremes—He that endeavours to please every body is a fool; he that resolves to please nobody is something worse: usefulness, the grand object, is defeated both ways. Whoever has the approbation of the multitude for his only, or for his principal end, must submit to ten thousand unbecoming meannesses, and after all will fail of attaining it. But I would not, upon this occasion, treat the lower orders of our fellow christians and subjects with that supercilious scurrility and abuse which is so frequently and so liberally thrown upon them: they by no means deserve it. The reproachful terms of mob, and populace, and such like, seem to come with strange impropriety from a minister's mouth. Were it not for them, our ministrations, generally speaking, would be to little purpose: it is among them, poor and despised as they are, that the spirit of christianity, and the practice of it too, though indeed with many corruptions and abuses, are chiefly to be found. By studiousness of popular favour, then, I do not understand that attention and regard which every minister ought to, and which every

good minister most certainly will pay to the real interests of all the precious souls committed to his charge, without respect of persons; but a mean compliance with the humours and prejudices of men, whether high or low, rich or poor, in order to gain their good will, at the expense of duty and conscience. There is a certain dignity of character, unconnected with pride, which all of us should endeavour to possess, and the want of which will always render a man despicable, disdaining with equal scorn the censure of a prejudiced multitude, or the frown of an overbearing great man. It is of importance to remember, that though we are appointed of God, the servants of the people for Christ's sake, yet it is in such a manner that we are at the same time to bear a kind of rule and authority over them: and this rule and authority, whoever will exercise according to the dictates of conscience, must become obnoxious to many; by the consciously guilty he will be traduced, avoided, perhaps hated, and the best may be so; but there is no fear that he will ever be despised. Let this be our rule then, in our conduct with the people, never to aim at purchasing their good-will, with the loss of a good conscience; to consult their real welfare rather than their taste; to endeavour by all means to make them truly good, rather than to give them

ground to entertain a good opinion of themselves; in a word, to try by gentle methods to dispel their prejudices, and neither fawningly fall in with them, nor haughtily scorn them. It is easy to see, that from the pride and self-love which are so natural to man, one who acts in this manner may for a season be very unacceptable, and that he who acts otherwise may be for a season caressed; but it is as easy to see what will be the case in process of time: perseverance in meaning, and in acting worthily, will meet with the due reward of reputation at last; unwearied endeavours to be agreeable may succeed for a while, but will undoubtedly be treated with just contempt in the end. But on the other hand, what can he propose to himself, who studies by every means to be unpopular?—who on all occasions must be expressing resentment and contempt of the people.—Is this the way to recommend unto them the gospel? is this the way to win them to Christ? It is scarcely possible to observe violent abuse of this kind, without suspecting that the people have begun the quarrel; that the rage of disappointment in missing popularity determines such a procedure as much as the manly freedom of sentiment which he pretends: for there is not, I dare say, that person living, who would not wish to be well thought

and well spoken of, if it were consistent with justice:—a contrary method of thinking and acting, I shall hardly be brought to account a proof of very great wisdom; as indeed I can conceive nothing more unaccountable, more contemptible, than the whole of such a conduct. The

Fifth and last source of contempt, which I shall mention, is, immoderate attachment to party and politics. Of all the men in the world, the clergy of at least this part of the kingdom*, seem, from every circumstance, placed farthest out of the circle of politics; is it not then both ridiculous and contemptible for men of this character and profession to strain and bustle out of their proper sphere, and thrust into one where they have, that is, ought to have, no manner of concern?—But the mischief is, we are involved in parties and politics of our own, in conducting which, while we are so blind as to imagine we are doing God good service, his service, strictly and truly so called, is on all hands too much neglected. I would not be thought to recommend indifference about any thing that has a relation to the church of Christ. Matters of government, of discipline, and even of form, must be attended unto: no good subject and son of the church will ever wish

* This discourse was delivered in Scotland.

to have these dispensed with: but this much may be said with truth and safety—that they occupy only the second place in the business of a minister, and that when they become sole or primary objects, matters of infinitely higher moment must be slighted. Before we can become members of this church, we all must make, and have made this solemn profession, "That zeal for the ho-"nour of God, love to Jesus Christ, and desire "of saving souls, are our great motives and chief "inducements, to enter into the function of the "holy ministry."—To lose sight of those great objects then, to "leave the word of God and "serve tables," is to be guilty of a crime too black to name. It is very evident, that violence of spirit this way, is too ready to incroach upon the great principles of justice, and honesty, and decency; for the man is yet unborn, who, launching into the vast ocean of politics, can say with certainty, "thus far I will go, and no farther." The mind is necessarily whetted, the balance of the soul is lost, the malevolent passions are roused on both sides. Acrimony takes possession of the heart—the partizans soon come to entertain a hearty contempt of each other, and the impartial observers, if any such there be, can hardly fail to despise both; for it must sensibly affect the most ordinary observer, to see the no-

ble powers of reason and eloquence shamefully misapplied in supporting or pulling down a favourite or obnoxious cause, which might be so successfully employed in edifying the body of Christ, and in destroying the empire of vice and irreligion. When, O my God! shall we behold factions lost, swallowed up, in love to thee, in love to precious immortal souls, in love to one another? The contention were glorious indeed—who should do most for our great master, who should most effectually promote the interests of his kingdom over the hearts of men, who should be the happy instrument of bringing most sons unto glory. Which brings me to the

Second general head, namely, to point very briefly what appear to be the most probable means of escaping contempt.—And the

First and great point certainly is, to cultivate in ourselves the christian spirit and temper—to set the example of our blessed Lord constantly before us—to be unfeignedly, strenuously, uniformly good. There is a kind of charm in true goodness, which all, even the most abandoned, must feel—and revere. The want of it is not to be made up by the possession of all other qualities put together, however great, however shin-

ing.—Let us endeavour then not only to appear, but to be patterns of purity, of gravity, of piety; from the good treasure of a good heart, bringing forth all the fruits of a holy life—that person never will be despised who thus acts up to his character; who shews that he is in earnest with regard to the great business of religion. Would we wish to escape contempt, would we wish to do good, let us study to be good.

A second security against contempt, is constantly to make it appear, that our great aim is to promote the essential, the eternal interests of mankind; that we have nothing so much at heart as to make them wise and good, wise unto salvation. When people observe, which perhaps they are too quick at doing, that ministers make their preaching and other ministrations merely a matter of form and custom, a kind of secondary business, they must and do conclude, that the pastoral charge is undertaken for the emoluments of it, or from some other motive equally base, and must accordingly hold in great contempt any who are capable of such meanness and absurdity; but if, on the other hand, they observe a constant and zealous attention to their true and proper business, a disinterested concern for the cause of real vital godliness, an assiduous

watchfulness over their own conduct, and the "flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made "them overseers;" they will of necessity, admire, revere, and love such a character.

Thirdly, Let us endeavour, as much as in us lies, to get above worldly hopes and worldly fears. A minister of Jesus Christ should be above fear, for what has he to fear? and what has this world to excite his hope? God knows, we have little to lose, and it is matter of thankfulness, that we are in no danger of losing that little; and the utmost we have to expect as ministers, either in point of wealth or honour, is, comparatively speaking, but a trifle, and thus providence has wisely placed us in that happy middle state which seems secured from pride and ambition on the one hand, and a mean dependance on the other. Let us then assert our own independence, and stand in awe of our great Master alone; let our hopes and fears be excited only by his promised approbation and threatened displeasure, doing all things as unto God and not as unto men, and the love of men will come unsought, will follow of necessary consequence. Finally, let us in compliance with the apostle's advice, speak, exhort, recommend, inculcate in public and in private, by preaching and by ex-

ample, the great doctrines of the gospel, that we "may edify both ourselves and them that "hear us," and promote the glory of the great head of the church, "who gave some, apostles; "and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; "and some, pastors and teachers; for the per- "fecting of the saints, for the work of the mi- "nistry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of "the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a per- "fect man, unto the measure of the stature of "the fulness of Christ." To which glorious state of happiness and of perfection, may all of us, in God's good time be brought, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XX.

JONAH i. 6.

What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God.

TO SEA-FARING MEN*.

IN a country like Great Britain, whose prosperity in peace and success in war greatly depend upon the numbers and virtue of its sea-faring men, it is surely the duty of every good citizen to contribute all in his power to the increase of virtue among that class of his fellow subjects: and it is, in a particular manner, the duty of every minister of the gospel, to consider and attempt every probable mean of impressing the minds of all under his charge with a due sense of religion, which exalts and supports both nations and individuals.

This, it is hoped, will sufficiently evince the propriety of my addressing a discourse to my

* This Sermon was delivered in the church of South Leith.

hearers of that profession. In so doing I would humbly presume to flatter myself, that I shall render an important service to a very important part of that flock over which God in his good providence has placed me in the pastoral office; and at the same time have an opportunity of advancing my mite toward the happiness and security of my dear native country.

Since, therefore, my brethren, I have seen it to be my duty to compose and deliver a sermon, with a particular view to your improvement in goodness, and consequently in true felicity, I hope you will consider it as your duty to listen to it with particular attention.

A wise and gracious providence has surrounded our happy island with the strongest of ramparts, the SEA, and has given much additional strength to this natural bulwark, in our almost numberless naval squadrons, which national pride not unjustly accounts the glory of the whole earth. Were but the conductors of these squadrons universally actuated by the noble principles of religion and patriotism, what people under heaven could pretend to rival us, in strength, in glory, and in happiness?—And, in this, my very dear friends, every one of you has the deepest

concern, none of you is unimportant to his country, none of you but may in a greater or less degree contribute to its great interests; endeavour then to feel your own importance, and be assured that every accession to your personal virtue is an accession of safety and honour to the great whole, whereof every individual, however mean and obscure, is a part. I cannot help sometimes considering our national force in the light of Samson's invincible locks, to which each particular hair lends its proportion of strength, and of course possesses its proportion of value: and ye are that to the body politic, which Samson's celebrated hairs were to him, at once its glory and its strength.

But your importance, great as it is, may be increased a thousand fold: if, as Britons you have hitherto been invincible, as christians you should ever be so; if as men and sailors, you are already become a wall of iron and brass to your native land, O were it our happiness to see a spirit of true godliness diffused over you, these walls would be rendered more impenetrable than the adamantine rock, and devouring as a wall of fire, should emit destruction upon every enemy of our religion and liberties; God himself should then be

our safety, and the arm of omnipotence our defence.

It is much to be regretted, that among the many good qualities which are commonly and deservedly ascribed to you, regard to religion is not, cannot generally be reckoned of the number. Humane, and faithful, and generous, and liberal, and brave, all men readily allow you to be; what pity is it, that so many shining accomplishments should want the distinguished lustre which genuine piety sheds upon moral virtue, that you should fail there, where most it concerns you to excel. I shall, therefore, begin with a serious and earnest persuasive to the study and practice of the religion of Jesus Christ, in which the eternal welfare of your own immortal souls, and the good of your country, are at once so very nearly interested.—And O! may your ears be opened to receive, and your hearts effectually determined to embrace and practise the truth as it is in Jesus.—May God of his infinite mercy inspire you with heavenly wisdom, and enrich your minds with heavenly grace.

Suffer me to ask you, then, with all plainness, have you ever seriously considered whether or

not you are possessed of immortal souls, and whether they are reconciled to God by the blood of his Son; or in a state of enmity against God, and consequently exposed to all the dreadful effects of his wrath? And, O! have you ever considered, what a fearful thing it is to have the wrath of God abiding upon you; to have the Almighty for your adversary? If this has hitherto been a stranger to your thoughts, as you love your own everlasting peace, let it be so no longer.

Give me your attention for a little, ye young sailors; I promise myself a great deal from you; I am desirous of taking the start of those who wish your hurt, who would decoy you into vices, to which by nature, by years, and by constitution, ye are already but too much inclined—I am desirous of giving you such views of your true interests, as by the blessing of God may secure you from the "paths wherein destroyers go." I beseech you then, consider your present situation—just returned from the fatigues and dangers of your hard employ, and just about to embark in the same perilous course:—perhaps you have just finished a first or second voyage: let me suppose that you have chosen this way of life in opposition to the prudent remonstrances of a

wise and affectionate father, and the tears and intreaties of a tender anxious mother. Dost thou not remember, my young friend, what a severe struggle it cost them to part with thee; how their bowels yearned over thee; how their hearts, and lips, and eyes overflowed with tenderness and grief? It may be thou art the son, the only son of thy mother, and her a widow—the expected prop and comfort of her solitary old-age—and hast thou already forgot a mother's parting prayers, and blessings, and requests?—I hear, I see her thus expressing the anguish of her melting soul, at the killing moment of separation "And wilt thou then leave me, son of my "care, son of my hope, son of my love? Wilt "thou thus bereave me of the only remaining "pledge of an ever-to-be regretted husband's "love? Wilt thou thus tear thee from these "arms, which so often ached under thee in thy "helpless infancy, which never declined the de-"lightful burden, which would enfold thee for "ever? Must thou now become the author of my "sorrow, who hast hitherto been the spring of "my joy? must I give up so soon, what my fond "heart would not be separated from for a sin-"gle moment? and O! hadst thou no way but "this to crush a mother's sinking spirit? thy de-"parture and thy death are the same thing to

" me; for I shall never, never behold thee more. " Tempestuous seas, barbarous men, unwholesome " climates, all conspire to rob me of my soul's " darling. I see thee smitten with disease in a " strange land, no fond parent nigh thee to " soothe thy pains, to tend thy bed, to watch thy " slumbers, to bear all thy troubles, to sweeten " the bitterness of death with maternal sym- " pathy, to close thy eyes, and die beside " thee.

" O! that thou couldst yet relent! O! that " this last entreaty might prevail! O! that thou " wouldst yet take pity on her who loves thee as " her own soul, who would cheerfully go to " death, if it could make thee happy! Ah no! " I see with horror how fixed thy purpose is; " thou art then determined to bring down my " grey hairs with sorrow to the grave: and what " sorrow is equal to my sorrow?—Parting with " thee now, parting with thee for life, is not the " thousandth part of my grief, and of my terror. " Could I but hope thou wert one of God's chil- " dren, an heir of eternal life, how cheerfully " would I resign thee, how cheerfully submit to " this determination of the divine will!—But " when I consider, dreadful thought! my soul " shrinks back, it is dissolved within me—my

" dear child in the broad way that leads to de-
" struction! my child an heir of hell! about to
" be separated from me for ever.—Father of
" mercies, deliver me from this most dreadful of
" curses! spare, O spare my son, my hope, my
" life—save, save him from perishing eternally!
" In mercy to him, in mercy to me, prolong his
" life; give him space for repentance; be not
" provoked to cut off his days in the midst, while
" his sins are unrepented of, while he continues
" to be thy enemy. But O! stop his fatal ca-
" reer, bring him back to the shepherd and bi-
" shop of souls, to whose service I early devoted
" him, make him thine own, and then take him
" to thyself whenever thou wilt.

" Go my son, with mine, with God's blessing,
" may thousands of angels minister unto thee,
" may God himself be thy safeguard by land and
" by sea, by night and by day—be wise, be vir-
" tuous, be a christian, and give heavenly joys to
" this bleeding heart. Farewell, we shall meet
" no more on this earth: but I will, I must en-
" tertain the dear, the delightful hope of meeting
" thee in the kingdom of God; my soul springs
" forward to the blessed day, when I shall find
" thee again, to enjoy thee for ever in a happier
" and more exalted state."

Suffer me, my dear young man, to join my wishes, and prayers, and blessings to those of such an anxious and such an excellent parent: I trust she has not put up so many petitions in thy behalf, in vain: even now they are going to be answered, even now they are about to take effect: I know thou art determined to grant, at least, one half of her desire; I do not advise thee to quit thy profession, for an all-wise God, it is to be hoped, has over-ruled thy choice for good; it may prove useful to thy country, and profitable to thyself: but thou canst not, surely, refuse compliance with her ardent wishes for thy immortal soul, especially as thy own interest is here so deeply engaged. Surely thou art not already hardened; thou art not as yet got beyond all feeling, beyond remorse—thy habits of vice cannot have so soon taken full root. But I tremble to think of thy going to sea again in thy present condition, to a way of life not altogether friendly to religion, among companions no better, or worse than thyself. I should tremble for thee, even were I assured of thy being founded, established in principles and habits of virtue, for I well know the danger which arises to young, inexperienced minds, from bad advice, bad example, and the unfavourable circumstance of standing alone in the midst of many wicked: but when I add to all these dangers and disadvantages, thy own fa-

tal propensity to sin, which needs neither fresh temptation nor opportunity, thy case seems almost desperate, thou appearest as a victim set apart for the slaughter. If the divine goodness interpose not, if this solemn warning be neglected, at what a pitch of vice and wretchedness mayest thou arrive. I see daily insensibility growing upon thee; I see thee waxing in sin; I see these seeds of wickedness fixing themselves, taking root and spreading in thy heart, occupying by little and little every corner of it; I see them springing up, under the accursed influence of those numberless showers of temptation, which fill the pestilential air wherein thou breathest, growing with thy growth, and strengthening with thy strength, till at length they yield their full crop of sorrow, till thou becomest a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction.——What is to be done then?—what? up, escape for thy life, look not behind thee, fly, "fly from the wrath to "come. What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, "call upon thy God, if so be that God will "think upon thee, that thou perish not"—yet, "yet there is hope concerning thee, for God still "waiteth that he may be gracious, seek the Lord "while he may be found," break off thy sins by righteousness—"behold now, is the accepted "time, behold now is the day of salvation."

Perhaps, unhappy youth, thou art an orphan, and hast none to care for thy body or thy soul—robbed in thy helpless years of father and mother, thy providers and protectors, thou hast, perhaps, been driven to sea by hard necessity—reduced to earn a scanty and a coarse morsel of bread with the sweat of thy brow, and at the perpetual hazard of thy life. Were this, however, the whole of thy misery, I should not stop a moment to pity thee; hardships such as these may be endured, and must soon come to an end:—I am thankful that necessity has done so much, for I daily see some in the same destitute condition, whom despair, confirmed by some other unhappy circumstances, has bound over to idleness, and all the horrid train of vices which attend it—whilst thou hast been determined to seek after some lawful provision for thy poor perishing body, whilst thou art somehow useful to society and to thyself—O that a much greater necessity might drive thee a step farther—even to make provision for thy poor perishing soul. This is my earnest advice to you, this shall be my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning you.

Brought up in poverty, and ignorance, and vice, it may be thou hast never till this day been

seriously admonished of thy miserable condition, or if admonished, from stupidity and inattention hast profited nothing. Once more therefore be informed, that verily there is a God, who is at once most terrible to punish the obstinately wicked, and most merciful to forgive and reward, humble, repenting sinners:—know that he is "in Christ "Jesus reconciling the very chief of sinners unto "himself." I can safely assure thee of this to-day, but I cannot secure thy life till to-morrow: I do not promise that thou shalt return from another voyage; and that then thou wilt be more disposed to ask, or God to grant thee mercy than at present; on the contrary, I am sufficiently warranted to say, that delay will assuredly harden thy heart more and more. What force can restrain the winds and the seas from raging? The tempest may overtake, the deep may open its mouth and swallow thee up: or shouldst thou escape this—may not thy conscience become silent, being seared as with a hot iron? may not thy heart lose all feeling? may not God give thee up, and cease to strive with thee any longer?

Let me once more suppose, that thou art one of those forlorn young creatures, whom brutal lust has brought into the world, and more than

brutal cruelty has exposed to its mercy. Unhappy foundling! let me shed the tear of compassion over thee. Thy unnatural, thy monstrous parents deserted thee an helpless infant. Cursed be their lust, for it is shameful; and their cruelty, for it disgraces humanity: even thy mother had no compassion upon the son of her womb, but, hellish barbarian! left thee to perish as cold, or hunger, or accident might first determine; at best left thee, friendless, hopeless, unendeared, upon the face of the wide world, whose tender mercies to such as thee, too often are cruel. And yet who can refrain from pitying and relieving thy shame and thy misery? What heart can withhold that care and humanity which thine own have denied? Let me call upon your fellow creatures, whom providence has placed in happier circumstances, to shew you kindness, for the Lord's sake; let me call upon my own soul to listen to the voice of duty and of nature, which loudly pleads in your behalf. Suffer me, at least, to express my concern about thy better, thy immortal part, which, it is to be feared, never has yet come under thy own consideration—precious is thy soul in the sight of God—the father of the fatherless—but thou art ignorant and regardless of him: thou hast, alas! no mother to recom-

mend thee to his love; thou hast not been taught to pray for thyself—let me do it for thee, or rather let me put words in thine own mouth: go seek a corner for thyself, and thus pour out thy soul to the Father of spirits.

"Most merciful God and father, I fly unto "thee, because there is none else to whom I can "fly; O let me find that relief from thy mercy, "which is no where else to be found: permit "me with the deepest humility to cast myself "before thy foot-stool, and to recommend my "destitute, lamentable state to thy divine pity "and assistance. Thou beholdest me, O God, a "miserable outcast; driven from among men; "forsaken in infancy by those whom nature "should have disposed to cherish and protect "me; delivered up as a prey to rags, and want, "and shame, and ignorance, and sin. Thanks "be to thy gracious and watchful providence, I "was not suffered to perish in these mournful "circumstances, but was miraculously pre-"served in life, when every thing threatened to "rob me of it:—when father and mother for-"sook me, the Lord was graciously pleased to "take me up; I was cast upon thee from the "womb, and thou hast cared for me. But alas,

"O Lord! though this miserable life has been "spared, though necessary food and raiment "have been provided for this wretched body, my "immortal soul has been left to perish through "lack of knowledge. I never till this day con- "sidered how very miserable I am—I never "concerned myself about my everlasting in- "terests, never reflected whether there was a "God or not, but have madly gone on in "a course of profaning his name, his sabbath, "and in boldly defying his power and authority: "I never reflected, till now, upon the danger I "am in, upon the dreadful consequences of my "wicked courses. But my affrighted conscience "now begins to tell me, that, verily, I am in the "road to endless perdition, that God will by no "means clear the guilty, that my sins are too "many and too great to be forgiven, that I must "for ever suffer the punishment which they de- "serve. I begin to wish I had never been, or "that I had perished from the womb; that the "barbarity of my parents had indeed deprived "me of life as soon as I was born. How much "sin, how much misery should I thus have "escaped! and through thy great goodness, O "God, I should then have been delivered from "the terror and danger of eternal torments.

" But now, wretched creature that I am, what " shall become of me! I have lived but to offend " thee, my most kind benefactor; I have ren- " dered God my enemy, and thus stand every " moment exposed to the stroke of his tremen- " dous justice; I see nothing but hopeless ruin " before me; I am a terror to myself. God " be merciful to me a sinner! preserve, O pre- " serve me from perishing for ever! Have I not " heard of thee, O my God, my father, my only " friend, that thou art good and long-suffering, " full of compassion, and plenteous in mercy? " and have I not the highest reason to be as- " sured that it is so, seeing thou hast exercised " such wonderful patience toward an offender so " daring and so presumptuous? I must, I will " hope, that so much care and kindness has not " been bestowed upon me in vain: that it is a " pledge of farther and greater goodness, of love " to my immortal soul. Have I not likewise heard, " that thou has sent thine only son into the world, " to seek and to save that which was lost, to make " up peace betwixt God and man: and indeed I " have but heard of this, for I have been bred in " gross ignorance of every thing good; but O! " my soul wishes, earnestly, anxiously wishes " that such joyful news may be true: with what

" delight would I welcome the glad tidings that
" God himself had provided a saviour for such as
" me! with infinitely greater satisfaction than
" ever I did the calm light of the morning, after a
" long and dark tempestuous night. I will believe
" it, I will rest upon it, I will take comfort to
" myself:—and O! what unutterable joy is this,
" which now begins to spring up in my soul! Shall
" I then, disowned, rejected, contemned by the
" whole world, at length find a father? and will
" God himself condescend to become that father?
" will the great majesty of heaven and earth deign
" to look with a favourable eye upon a poor
" helpless foundling child, and what is infinitely
" worse, an unthankful, thoughtless, graceless
" rebel? How, O how can these things be!
" who shall make the reconciliation? who shall
" take away my manifold offences, my highly
" aggravated guilt? who shall purify this sinful
" heart from its filthiness? Will not that Jesus of
" whom I have heard; whom, alas! I know not,
" but with whom I desire above all things to be
" acquainted; will not he teach me what I shall
" do to be saved? will not he bring me unto
" God? O Lord, enlighten my dark mind;
" what I know not, that do thou teach me, give
" me the knowledge of the only true God, and
" of Jesus Christ whom he has sent, whom to

"know is life eternal; make me what thou "wouldst have me to be. By thy grace, and "depending upon thy aid, I am determined to "forsake my sins, to withdraw myself from my "ungodly companions, and to love and serve "thee with my whole soul. When this evil "heart would betray me into vice, I will fly to "thee for deliverance from myself; when sinners "entice me, I will implore the direction of thy "heavenly wisdom, and the protection of thy "almighty strength, that I may not be suffered "to commit, when I am in doubt and per-"plexity, I will ask wisdom of God; when I fall "into sin, I will make immediate application to "the throne of thy grace for mercy to pardon; "and such is thy goodness, I know thou wilt not "forsake the work of thine own hands."

Were I but so happy as to prevail with you, in these or such like circumstances, to commit your case, whatever it is, unto God, by humble prayer and supplication, I should reckon my work very far advanced, for every thing good is to be expected of him, whom the feeling of distress has taught to pray:—consult then your own heart, your own necessities—they will furnish you both with matter and language; and the sooner this work is begun, the more successful it

will prove; it will be an excellent means of correcting bad habits; for if you are sincere in your addresses to God, you will see the necessity of immediately breaking off your irreligious courses —what a contradiction would it be to indulge yourselves in what you are earnestly begging divine assistance to resist and overcome; and the ceasing to do evil is the first part of learning to do well.

I will flatter myself that I may have prevailed upon some one or other dear young creature seriously to consider what he owes to God, what he owes to his own immortal soul, and that thereby his country has gained one more valuable son, and a Redeemer's kingdom another happy subject. Suffer me to thank, with humble gratitude, the Father of mercies, upon your account, for the joy given to the angels in heaven and the saints on earth upon this blessed occasion: suffer me, with heart-felt satisfaction, to congratulate you as a child of the most high God and an heir of eternal glory, and to direct you to ascribe the praise and thanksgiving to the unmerited love of God, and to the compassionate Jesus, who loved the souls of men even unto the death. O! study to walk, even as he walked, and prove yourself to be his disciple by having

" the same mind in you which also was in him." And " unto him who is able to keep you from " falling, and to present you faultless before the " presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to " the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and " majesty, dominion and power, both now and " ever. Amen."

But, alas! with how many have I not prevailed? With how many are a foolish shame, a listless sloth, and the strength of corruption, more powerful than the remonstrances of reason and conscience? I had formed great expectations of success, and indeed almost my only expectations, from your time of life; and shall I, must I be mortified and disappointed? must I bestow upon you labour in vain? must I leave you in the hands of your enemies? Thoughtless, unhappy creatures, farewell! it may be, we shall meet no more till the sound of the last trumpet summon us together to the judgment seat of Christ: where, perhaps, the neglect of this very warning shall be exhibited as one article of the dreadful charge against you, and when you shall find in your unhappy experience, that the bitter recollection of despised mercy is the severest of all torments. From you I must now turn to that God, whom you so much slight and forget,

and humbly recommend you to his compassion, earnestly praying that for the sake of Jesus Christ, he would think upon you, that ye perish not; that at some other time, and by some other means, you may be effectually persuaded to lay to heart "the things which belong to your ever-"lasting peace," and that you may be prevented from trusting to an uncertain hereafter, the gulf in which thousands, and ten thousands, have made shipwreck of their immortal souls.

I have said, that my hopes of success are strongest from the young and uncorrupted, and for that reason I have set myself in a more particular manner, to catch their attention, and influence their hearts. But God forbid that I should despair of prevailing with those of a more advanced age—that I should give up as hopeless and irreclaimable all who have made any considerable progress in life; let me rather suggest to you such circumstances in your present situation, as seem most calculated to rouse and interest you.

You are putting your lives in jeopardy every hour, you are, in the exercise of your profession, daily appointed to stations of imminent danger, suspending your bodies by a slender rope, climbing to the top of a mast; you are often heard to

boast of bold and dangerous feats—you have seen some of your brethren so fool-hardy as to stand upon the top of a mast, perhaps have been such fools yourselves; but did you ever see or hear of one so mad as to adventure to fall asleep on such a station? I suppose not; but, alas! you yourselves are performing that awful miracle of madness every moment you live unreconciled to God; you are lulled asleep on the brink of endless perdition; your immortal spirits are suspended over the bottomless pit by a thread, a hair—if any thing by so uncertain a hold as the brittle cord of life, which with you is liable to be burst asunder by numberless accidents, more than that of other men.

Would it be deemed an impertinent question, if I should ask whether you have ever been in a storm or an engagement, and from these, or any other cause, in immediate danger of losing your life? What, O man, were thy thoughts then, when instant death and opening eternity were disclosing their dread solemnities to thine eyes? Did not thy heart melt within thee in the prospect of appearing before the tribunal of God? Were not thy fears roused as a devouring lion, when, at that awful moment, unrepented guilt stared thee in the face? What

wouldst thou then have given for a short reprieve to make up thy peace with heaven? At what price wouldst thou then have purchased the mercy of God? Perhaps, miserable sinner, thou wert, even in such circumstances, stupidly hardened against such imminent danger, insensible of the terrors of thy impending fate; perhaps thou wert incapable of thought, unable so much as to recommend thy perishing soul to mercy; perhaps, dreadful state! thou wert imprecating the divine vengeance upon thy own head, madly consigning thyself, soul and body, to eternal damnation. God, who is rich in mercy, has compassionated thy case, though thou hast had so little compassion upon thyself; he has not taken thee at thy word, else thou shouldst even now have been lifting up thine eyes in torment; thou hast had thy reprieve, and, blessed be God, it is not yet expired. And "despisest thou," O man, "the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, "and long-suffering, not knowing that the good-"ness of God should lead thee to repentance?" Art thou, after thy "hardness and impenitent "heart, treasuring up to thyself, wrath against "the day of wrath, and revelation of the righte-"ous judgment of God?" Thou hast not been respited in vain; it is either that thou mayest have space for working out thy salvation, or that

the justice of God may stand more clearly vindicated in thy condemnation; that thou mayest stand inexcusable before God, to the conviction of thine own heart, having despised a call so alarming, and misimproved a deliverance so graciously intended. I cannot suffer myself to think you capable of such obstinate stupidity, or of such desperate thoughtlessness, as to sit down contented under the latter part of this important alternative; I persuade myself, that you are now sensible of your situation, and fully determined, by the grace and strength of God, to employ the present precious opportunities of being restored to the favour and protection of your heavenly Father, and thereby secured from the dangers of life, the fears of death, and the horrors of eternal punishment.

But what shall I say to those unhappy men, who are already much hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, whom imminent dangers and miraculous escapes have only served to confirm in desperate, obdurate contempt of God, and unconcern about their own interests?—and would to God this were a less frequent case than it is. Will you not join me, my dear fellow christians, in deploring the misery of these precious perishing immortals, who are but one short step re-

moved from the pains of hell-fire, who are rushing as fast as time and wickedness can hurry them to the sufferance of tormenting flames which shall never be quenched, and the stings of the worm that dieth not? Who can tell, O sinner, whether the tempest may not already have begun to gather, whether the billow may not already have received its commission, whether the rock may not already be prepared, which is to sink thee into remediless despair? Can imagination itself paint a situation more dreadful than thine, should this be the case? to be cut off even in the blossoms of thy sin, sent to render thy account, and no space afforded for repentance; not so much as a moment to cry for mercy. Yes, I can conceive one still more horrible—vengeance may suffer thee to live, thou mayest be permitted to go on, and fill up the measure of thy iniquity, to sin away more precious time, more precious means of salvation, to walk in the imagination of thine heart, to harden thyself yet more and more against the motions of God's Spirit, to arm omnipotence with more vengeful fury against thee, and blow up the flames of thy torment to a seven-fold rage.

When I consider this, can I sit still and be silent? can I be at peace when I see you driving

heedlessly to your ruin? No; let me now take to myself the trump of God, the word of this gospel, and sound an alarm in thine ears, lest I be prevented by the voice of the archangel rousing thee from thy prison, and hurrying thee to judgment. "What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, "call upon thy God: if so be that God will "think upon thee, that thou perish not: sinner, "awake, awake, awake, consider with whom thou "hast to do—with him, who after he has killed, "can destroy both soul and body in hell. Who "ever hardened himself against God and prospered?" Canst thou pluck the Almighty from his throne? hast thou an arm like God? canst thou thunder with a voice like his? or hast thou deliberately taken up the horrid resolution of dwelling with "devouring fire," of fixing thy final residence in the midst of "everlasting "burnings?" O! yet bethink thyself before it be too late; while yet there is hope, while yet thou art recoverable: "Seek the Lord while "he may be found, call upon him while he is "near:" give thy soul no rest till thou findest it in God.

I am often witness to a scene which seldom fails to affect me in a very sensible manner; I mean the striking appearance of a stately vessel

taking her departure, amidst the loud acclamations of the mariners on board, and of anxious relations and other spectators on shore; amidst the mutual expressions of affection, and prayers for health and prosperity. The pleasantness of such a scene to me is frequently overcast, from the melancholy reflection, that between some on board and on shore the separation may indeed be sudden and final. I tremble to think that the swift wings of the wind may be hurrying some one thoughtless, graceless, hardened creature to hopeless misery; to think how soon the cheerfulness of the jovial crew may be turned into heaviness, with some into the blackness of despair; to think how few are prepared for sudden death, and judgment, and eternity.

Suffer me then, my dear brethren, to charge, to exhort, to beseech you, as upon my bended knees to beseech you, by every dear, every tender name, by the infinite worth of your precious souls, by the ardent love I bear you, by the bowels and mercies of the compassionate Redeemer, before you venture to sea again, before you reimbark in your painful, your dangerous occupation, fly, fly to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; fly to the wide extended friendly port of a Saviour's out-stretched arms; fly for

shelter to the covert of his blood and righteousness, lest the furious storm of divine wrath overtake you. Secure omnipotence for your safeguard; secure an interest in redeeming love, as your everlasting portion; secure the pardon and peace of God, the only balm for a wounded conscience; secure the blessed hope of glory and immortality, as an anchor for the soul, to establish you in safety and comfort amidst the wars of convulsed elements, and the agonies of approaching dissolution, and then go undismayed through winds and waves, through rocks and quicksands, for every element shall then become friendly, because God himself is your friend; then danger shall change its frightful aspect, distress shall smile, and death itself prove unspeakable gain.

Forgive my importunity, forgive my zeal; I cannot, must not think of parting with you, till I have gained my point; let me obtain some small reward of my labour; let me obtain your concurrence with my humble wishes and efforts to promote your spiritual interests; I ask no greater, no other recompence; let me be successful in bringing so much as one precious soul to God, and the fatigues of a whole life are more than repaid. Resolve at least to take these things under serious consideration; make a beginning,

and make it forthwith. Defer not, my brother, to cast thyself before God, to implore his mercy, his direction, his assistance. To the love of God I recommend you all, to the compassion and friendship of our heavenly advocate, and to the teaching and comfort of the Spirit of grace and truth. By his blessed influence may you be enabled to discern, having discerned to approve and choose, having chosen to pursue, and having pursued and persevered even unto the end, may you at length obtain the full reward of "wisdom's "ways, which are pleasantness, and all whose "paths are peace."

SERMON XXI.

Acts xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

ON PURITY OF CONSCIENCE.

IT is a very common, and I believe a very just observation, that happiness in one shape or other is the uniform and universal pursuit of all mankind: and it has frequently this further one added to it, namely, that it is as generally missed as it is eagerly sought after: to prove which, the usual complaining and discontent of the sons of men are insisted upon as demonstrative. It is undoubtedly certain, that most men are in a very considerable degree uneasy, not to say unhappy, and indeed it can hardly fail to be so, when we consider the means that are for the most part made use of, in order to arrive at happiness. Reason and experience with their united voice declare, that those en-

joyments which commonly go by the name of [illegible] of fortune, are altogether incapable of [illegible] only solid and lasting happiness, both [illegible] of their unsatisfying nature, and the [illegible] tenure by which they are possessed: [illegible] ions of sense are wholly disproportioned to the desires of an immortal and spiritual substance, such as is the human soul; and, in fact, we may see from every day's observation, as many instances of vexation and discontent in high as in low life, in those who have a great, as in those who have a small portion of the good things of this world. If we would therefore travel the certain road to real happiness, we will find ourselves much deceived, if we seek for it in the objects which surround us. There is but a very inconsiderable proportion of the human race who have it in their power to obtain it in this way. As we would not wish therefore to be eternally disappointed, let us lay the foundation of bliss in our own breasts, let us endeavour to banish thence whatever wounds or defiles, thereby securing the approbation of our Maker, and of our own hearts, exercising ourselves constantly in this with the great apostle of the Gentiles, "to "have a conscience void of offence toward God "and toward men," and this we will find a

source of happiness and joy which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away, this we will in our happy experience find to give double relish to prosperity, and lighten the burden of adversity—this we shall find the best of companions to walk with by the way, and to lie down with to rest—this will be welcome to our secret retirements, and carry us with ease and satisfaction through all the businesses of life—and this, blessed be God, is a happiness which every one has in his own power, a happiness from which no situation nor circumstances can exclude. It was this which we find supported our apostle under all the trials, afflictions, and persecutions he was called to undergo in fulfilling the work of his ministry, and by this he rose superior to all the reproach and malice of wicked men.

In discoursing farther from these words, I propose, through the divine aid, in the first place, to consider wherein "a conscience void of offence" consists. 2dly, To illustrate the happiness of having a good conscience, and the misery of a contrary state; and, 3dly, to draw a few inferences from the subject, with a design to engage us to seek after such a source of joy and satisfaction.—I return, therefore, in the

First place, To consider wherein "a conscience "void of offence" consists. In the text we find it divided into two heads, a consciousness of having performed our duty toward God and toward men. The obligations we lie under to love and serve God are demonstrated by the very same arguments which prove the existence and attributes of the Deity. As certainly as God is, and is possessed of all possible perfection, so certainly are we his dependent and indebted creatures bound to acknowledge with our utmost gratitude, affection, and humility, him our almighty and gracious author, preserver, and benefactor. In order then to understand what it is to have "a "conscience void of offence toward God," let us consider wherein our duty to God consists, and here the language of nature and revelation are exactly the same thing, namely, "Thou shalt love "the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with "all thy soul, and with all thy strength: this "is the first and great commandment*. If we examine into the obligations to this duty of love to God, we will find them the greatest that can be conceived. That Eternal and Almighty whom we profess to acknowledge as the author of our existence, and of every blessing, is in himself worthy of our highest veneration and

* Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

esteem, and it is intirely owing to our ignorance of the perfections of his nature, and [illegible] tion to the operations of his ha[illegible] our hearts so coldly disposed to[illegible] so gloriously calculated to fill [illegible] warmest emotions: a strong proof at the same time, of the low and degenerate [illegible] human nature is sunk, as the perfection of it undoubtedly is to resemble the divine, and this resemblance is only attainable by the frequent and attentive contemplation of what is amiable and perfect in God, which will naturally produce a desire of imitation; but in man's present corrupted state, the very reverse must hold, for there can be no tendency in men to imitate the perfections of the Deity, by reason of the little inclination they have to meditate upon, and search into them, or to observe the manifestations of them, which are made in the works of creation, providence, and redemption. These manifestations however, and in especial manner, of the divine wisdom and goodness, are so very evident, have been and daily are displayed in so expressive a manner, as to render all without excuse, who are so stupid and ungrateful as to neglect and overlook them. Besides, then, that veneration and love we owe the great author of nature, on account of the perfections of his na-

ture, what a glorious assemblage of additional arguments to this duty arise from the consideration of those endearing relations in which he stands to us; and the benefits he has conferred upon us. And here, the first that strikes us, is being itself, the primary, the fundamental blessing: that "we live, and move, and have our being," we owe to infinite power and wisdom; that this being is in any degree comfortable, we ought to ascribe to the boundless goodness of our heavenly Father. But mere existence is far from being the whole of what we have to be thankful for. I can only at present barely mention a few particulars, without any illustration: such as the superior rank we hold in the creation, raised so highly above the other creatures which inhabit this world, being made "wiser than the "beasts of the earth, and endued with more un-"derstanding than the fowls of heaven." Again, what is no less a blessing for its being common, we are not only endued with the forms of men, but likewise with the continued exercise of reason, which, alas! we are but too little sensible of—a manifest proof of the depravity of reason. The great value of this blessing can never be duly understood, but by comparing it with a contrary situation. How many of our species, by nature or accident, have been reduced to a condition so

deplorable, that it might be justly said of them, better for them that they had never been born; but we, all of us at least who are capable of attending to what I am now endeavouring to represent, are, blessed be the Father of Mercies, in a situation infinitely more comfortable. We know what is conducive to our happiness, we are able to judge what is for our interest, what we ought to pursue, and what to avoid; we can clearly discern wherein our chief good consists, and the way that leadeth to it. Further, the continued bounties of providence to us, ungrateful, undeserving, and disobedient, loudly call for our warmest acknowledgments:—Can we see and feel omnipotence daily, continually employed in our preservation, defending us against every danger, and supplying every want, when we have the highest reason to expect it should be armed with vengeance and fiery indignation for our utter destruction? can we unmoved behold such a display of the most amazing goodness? Alas! the stupidity of ungrateful man, we observe, we regard none of those things. "God is not in all "our thoughts," his very mercy and goodness towards us are too often abused by us to the utter neglect of the author of them.—But what most loudly calls for the gratefullest and most affectionate expressions of our hearts and lips, is

that incomprehensible instance of the divine love in the redemption of the guilty lost race of Adam, by Jesus Christ, God's own eternal son. To those who are acquainted with the gospel dispensation, and such I trust, are all within these walls, all I shall say is, that if they are able to stand out against the mercy and loving kindness therein expressed, their own consciences cannot but acquiesce in their condemnation. What could be done for us, that God has not already done? if this instance of goodness is scorned, mercy itself, even the divine mercy, can do no more; and what must be the misery of that man, whom eternal justice cannot but condemn, and whose stinging reflections must reproach with having obstinately rejected the highest offers of goodness which even God could make? "For if "we sin wilfully after that we have received the "knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no "more sacrifice for sins*." If we would know, therefore, the way to maintain "a conscience void "of offence toward God," it is to live under the power and influence of religion, or, in other words, from a sense of the number and greatness of the benefits conferred upon us by God, to have our hearts filled with the most ardent feelings of affection and gratitude towards him,

* Heb. x. 26.

which will naturally express themselves in an universal and unreserved obedience to all his commandments—for this is always the genuine and most undoubted proof of love. It is ever the nature of real affection to pay an unlimited regard to the pleasure of the beloved object, by carefully avoiding what is likely to offend, and constantly pursuing what may procure satisfaction; and even pain incurred in such a cause is far from being disagreeable—but with the love of God, our own self interest is likewise strictly connected, nay it is the very sum and substance of our happiness, for "in the keeping of "God's commandments is great reward." When the apostle therefore says, "he exercised himself "constantly to have a conscience void of offence "toward God," he means that it was the business of his heart and life, his chief study and aim, to do what was well pleasing in his sight, to live to his praise and glory.

Again, to have "a conscience void of offence "toward men," is to live in the habitual practice of those duties which we owe to one another, according to the different circumstances and relations in which we stand to one another; which duties, together with those we owe to our Maker, which have been already mentioned, comprehend the

whole of a christian's duty, and are summed up by the great author of the religion which we profess in a very few words: "Thou shalt love the "Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all "thy soul, and with all thy mind: this is the "first and great commandment. And the se-"cond is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neigh-"bour as thyself. On these two commandments "hang all the law and the prophets*." It were endless to recount all the particulars contained under this head; we are generally well acquainted with them, at least we ought to be so: in case we should ever find ourselves at a loss, our Saviour has given us a short, plain, and unerring rule to direct us herein: "All things whatsoever "ye would that men should do to you, do ye "even so unto them." We are naturally partial to ourselves, we are very much disposed to believe that we have more good, and fewer bad qualities than is really the case; this rule of our divine Master will teach us then to examine the conduct of our fellow men in the mirror of self-love, which never fails to extenuate blemishes and enhance excellencies; it will likewise teach us, that as we stand in need of the assistance of others in order to our well-being in life, so we are bound to contribute all in our power to the

* Matt. xxii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

relief and assistance of such of our brethren of mankind as stand in need of them at our hands: that as we frequently offend against our fellow men, and consequently stand in need of their forgiveness, so it is our duty to be of a mild and forgiving disposition toward them who have trespassed against us: that as our reputation and good name often lie at the mercy of others, and as we would wish to be tenderly dealt with in this particular, so it becomes us to be sparing and tender of the character of others. In a word, that it is our duty, both as rational creatures and christians, to root out from our hearts every remainder of vitiated passion, which too often hurries us on to the commission of what is highly indecent, and injurious to others, the consequence of which cannot fail to fill our own breast with the most cutting remorse, when the furious unruly gust is subsided; and who would be such a fool, as, for the boisterous pleasure of a moment's gratification, to run the dreadful, the certain risque of a lasting pain? Instead then of being the slaves of passion, to which we are so much addicted, let us endeavour to imitate the example of our blessed Saviour, "who did no sin, neither was "guile found in his mouth; who, when he was "reviled, reviled not again, when he was perse-"cuted he threatened not;" [illegible] forgiveness

extended even to those who embrued their hands in his blood; and let us endeavour to live in the practice of those virtues which tend to promote the peace, happiness, and good order of society, with which our own well being is naturally and necessarily connected. In order thereto, let us consider, that the light in which the christian religion teaches us to consider the whole human race, is that of brothers, of children of the same common father, of candidates for the same heavenly inheritance: let this have its due influence with us, teaching us to "love one another, to be "kindly affectioned one towards another, with "brotherly love forgiving one another, even as "God for Christ's sake hath loved and forgiven "us." This shall suffice, at present, as a brief explication of the exercise the apostle here mentions as his constant employment; namely, the habitual practice of all the duties arising from a principle of love to God, and to mankind. I proceed in the

Second place, to illustrate the happiness of having a conscience thus clear and serene, and the misery of a contrary situation. It is common, even to a proverb, to observe, that virtue is its own reward, and vice its own punishment; and in the nature of things it cannot be other-

wise, as will appear from considering the state of mind of a good and a wicked man in the following views. In the first place, let us suppose both the one and the other to be placed in circumstances of worldly prosperity, and we shall discover the former, from a sense of the favour and approbation of his Maker, and from a consciousness of the earnest desire he has ever felt to submit to his holy will in all things, and of the ardent zeal with which he has been ever actuated to promote his glory in the world; from a consciousness of this, I say, receiving and enjoying the bounties of a gracious Providence, with that filial love and gratitude which give a relish to every enjoyment, with the delightful confidence that the happiness he enjoys is the gift of that God whom he has ever studied to serve, as an earnest of his love, and a pledge of much greater and better spiritual blessings in a future world; with what inexpressible joy will such an one observe all the dispensations of infinite wisdom calculated to produce and increase his satisfaction, and the Almighty himself as interested with all his glorious attributes and perfections to bless him and do him good. But what happiness can that man find in the midst of worldly enjoyments, who is conscious that his Maker is his enemy? that he stands continually exposed to the indignation of th Al-

mighty adversary, whose justice is concerned to make him miserable? Wicked men, indeed, in the midst of worldly pleasures may, for a time, devise ways and means to stop the clamours of conscience, to drown its voice in the noise of mirth and intemperance; but there are seasons in which it will make itself heard, in spite of every effort to the contrary, and by those too whom their station sets above the fear of men; and O how dreadful the thunder of its voice to that man who is in a state of enmity with God, who has the highest reason to apprehend that even his blessings are cursed; that the omnipotence, the holiness, and the eternal equity of the divine nature breathe forth nothing but vengeance against him. How can such a reflection fail to embitter, to poison the cup of mirth and jollity, and throw a damp upon the gayest scenes of life? Of the many illustrations which might be adduced to this purpose, I shall content myself with singling out two; the one from sacred, the other from profane history, both in characters exalted to the highest stations in life, and thereby able to bid defiance to every check but that of their own consciences. The one is recorded in the book of Daniel: "Belshazzar the king "made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, "and drank wine before the thousand. Belshaz-

"zar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to "bring the golden and silver vessels, which his "father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the "temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, "and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, "might drink therein. Then they brought the "golden vessels that were taken out of the tem-"ple of the house of God, which was at Jerusa-"lem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, "and his concubines, drank in them. They drank "wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of sil-"ver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's "hand, and wrote over against the candlestick "upon the plaister of the wall of the king's pa-"lace; and the king saw the part of the hand "that wrote. Then the king's countenance was "changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so "that the joints of his loins were loosed, and "his knees smote one against another*." Without staying to make any observations on this, I proceed to the other instance, which I shall relate in a very few words, and with it conclude the present discourse. One of the tyrants of Sicily, who had raised himself to supreme and absolute power, by all the arts of ambition and cruelty, had, at the same time, made him-

* Daniel v. 1—6.

self master of immense treasure, which he as liberally bestowed on the purchase of every gratification of sense and appetite. Among the tribe of flatterers which never fail to attend greatness, however impious, one, in the midst of a splendid entertainment, began to extol the happiness which the tyrant, his master, enjoyed in the possession of whatever his heart could wish. Thy tyrant, to convince him of his mistake, proposed changing conditions with him for that night, and accordingly gave orders to prepare a most magnificent bed for his reception, in the noblest part of the palace. Evening being come, he is with great state laid upon it, a delicious banquet is served up, the finest concert of music is provided; and to crown all, beautiful young persons of both sexes are ordered to attend at table; in a word, nothing is omitted that could contribute to hoighten the entertainment: when in the midst of this bliss, the happy man turning up his eyes to the top of the bed, on which he lay, observed a drawn sword hanging by a single hair, directly over his throat, which the tyrant had before hand ordered to be so placed. Immediately all the happiness with which he was so lately surrounded, vanished; he is no longer sensible of the richness of the repast, the magnificence of the furniture, the harmony of the mu-

sic, the beauty of his attendants, but earnestly begged to be delivered, at the expense of his greatness, from the danger which threatened him. Similar to this must be the situation of every wicked man, in whatever circumstances he is placed. Conscience, like a drawn dagger suspended over his head, will blast all his enjoyments; for "the wicked are like the troubled sea, "which cannot rest, but whose waters cast up "mire and dirt." I should now proceed to consider the greater difference of situation betwixt the righteous and the wicked, arising from a good conscience in the one, and a troubled one in the other, when both are placed in circumstances of distress and adversity; and lastly, when both are placed in the prospect of death; but this, with what remains of the subject, must be delayed till afterwards. May God give us grace to exercise ourselves to have "a conscience void of "offence toward God and toward men," that when we come to die, we may have this comfortable testimony that we have pleased God. Amen.

SERMON XXII.

Acts xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

ON PURITY OF CONSCIENCE.

As the life of man at the longest is but very short, and at the best very uncertain, as it is only an introduction or prelude to our existence; and as an awful eternity is advancing upon us with a rapid progress—it must appear evident to every thinking mind that the principal, the only business of life should be to secure our eternal concerns, to live now as we shall wish to have done when we come to die—for we are assured, that as we sow now, we shall reap hereafter—"if we sow "to the flesh, we shall of the flesh reap corrup- "tion; but if we sow to the spirit, we shall of "the spirit reap life everlasting." My text points out the only way in which a man and a christian can live happily, die comfortably, and

secure eternal life and felicity—the only way whereby he can support himself under all the miseries and calamities of this mortal state, and die in peace with his Maker and with himself—namely, to maintain ever "a conscience void of "offence toward God and toward men." In discoursing upon a former occasion of this kind from these words, you will probably remember that the method I proposed, through the divine assistance, to observe was, in the first place, to consider wherein a conscience void of offence may be said to consist; second, to illustrate the happiness of having a good conscience, and the misery of a contrary state, and then lead to the improvement of the subject. The first of these particulars we have already considered, and observed that to have a conscience void of offence, was, in the first place, from a principle of love to God to live in the habitual performance of all the duties we owe him, as our almighty creator, our gracious preserver and bountiful benefactor—that veneration, and regard we owe him on account of the glorious excellencies of his nature, as a being possessed of every possible perfection, of infinite wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth—that submission to, and dependance upon him, which is his due as "the God of our life, and the

" length of our days, in whom alone we live, and " move, and have our being"—and that gratitude and affection we are bound to pay on account of what he has already done, still continues to do, and has given us the assurance of doing for us in the time to come. These blessings, which thus call for all the returns we are able to make are being itself, with all its attending comforts and enjoyments—daily, constant preservation in being and happiness—and redemption from misery and wrath, through the mediation and meritorious death and intercession of his son Jesus Christ; and secondly, we observed, that to have a conscience void of offence toward man, was from a principle of unfeigned charity toward our brethren of mankind, to live in the habitual practice of all the duties we owe one another according to the various stations and relations in which we stand to each other, as parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and friends, as the children of the same common father, the objects of the same gracious and universal providence, as the candidates and heirs of the same glorious immortality—and to live in the performance of these duties is to live in conformity to that short transcript of the moral law, delivered to us by our Lord himself, in these words: " Thou shalt " love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and

" with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, " and thy neighbour as thyself." And here it may naturally be enquired, how is the conscience to be thus maintained void of offence, by what means are we thus to approve ourselves the true children and servants of God, " without rebuke, " blameless and harmless in the midst of a crook- " ed and perverse nation, and shine as lights in " the world"—by our own natural powers? by our own conduct and strength? by our own wisdom and righteousness? by no means. The apostle to the Hebrews fully and satisfactorily answers this important enquiry—" The blood of Christ, who " through the eternal Spirit offered himself with- " out spot unto God, alone can purge our con- " sciences from dead works to serve the living " God."—This and this alone can make us alive unto holiness, and entitle us in the end to eternal life.

I had likewise entered upon the second general head; namely, to illustrate the happiness of having a good conscience, and the misery of a contrary state. In order to do which, we proposed to consider the state of the righteous and the wicked; of the person possessed of a good conscience, and a person haunted with a guilty conscience, under the following view[illegible]t, When

both are placed in circumstances of worldly happiness and prosperity; this has been already considered, and I now proceed to the second, namely, When they are placed in circumstances of trouble and distress; and thirdly, When they are placed in the view, in the near prospect of death, judgment, and eternity.

Secondly then, we shall regard them as both placed in circumstances of trouble and distress. Perfect happiness is wholly inconsistent with the notion of a state of probation such as ours is in this life, it being the express will and appointment of our heavenly Father that "through ma-"nifold tribulations we should enter into the "kingdom of God." Accordingly we see that the just are afflicted with troubles, many and various; for God bestows good and evil, happiness and misery in this world, not as rewards and punishments, but as proofs and trials. Hence we sometimes see vice triumphant and flourishing, piety depressed and persecuted; which made the psalmist give way to a fretful and envious spirit when he saw the prosperity of the wicked: "They are not troubled" says he, "like other "men, neither are they plagued like other men." But at present we are to suppose both to be placed in the same distressful situation; and what

does the prospect present?—the one with patience and resignation, with magnanimity and fortitude, submitting to the will of God, receiving the dispensation as from the hand of a merciful creator, of a wise and affectionate father, who loves him, studies his good in every thing, and knows what is fit for him, better than he possibly can do himself, and accordingly the language of his heart is, "Father, if it be thy will, let this cup "pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but "thine be done." Such a person can say, upon the best ground, "the Lord is on my side, I will "not fear."

But how widely different is the situation of the wicked man, of the man who is loaded with a guilty conscience—if he looks up, behold the dread tribunal of an offended God, who is ready to take vengeance upon him, ready to pronounce the irreversible sentence of condemnation—if he casts his eyes downward, what do they meet but the place of torment, the just reward of his sins, opening its mouth to swallow him up?—if he look around for relief from creature comforts, even that resource too has failed. Trouble surrounds him on every hand, his hopes are blasted, his wishes disappointed, his enjoyments taken away—he is deprived of every support, miserable com-

forters are all his past joys, they have left a mortal sting behind—and all within is storm and tempest, with this horrid aggravation, that his present misery is but the beginning of sorrow, that he stands exposed to "the sting of the "worm that dieth not, and to the fire which is "not quenched." I now proceed to consider the still greater difference of situation between the righteous and the wicked arising from a calm and quiet conscience in the former, and a troubled and guilty one in the other, when both are placed in the near prospect of death, and of a future and eternal state.

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and "let my latter end be like his," was the prayer of a very wicked man; and what stronger argument can be adduced for living a religious life, than the mixed apprehension and desire contained in such an exclamation? Though the wicked of the world may, in the abundance of health and affluence, and in their pride of heart, hold in derision the people of God, as a set of weak, poor spirited, despicable creatures, as the off-scourings of mankind—yet when matters come to the test of a death bed, when this world is withdrawing with its delusive enjoyments, and an eternal world disclosing all its awful solemnities then find, if

you can, the haughty despiser of God and religion? then find the scornful railer and scoffer at things sacred, then find the cruel mocker and persecutor of the righteous man:—no! the search will be vain: the language of Balaam will then be the language of the most obdurate sinner; and "O that I had lived the life of the "righteous," will, when it is too late, be the fervent prayer of the guilty, perishing soul. Let us now contemplate the blessed state of the dying christian. He looks back upon his past life with joy and satisfaction; he with pleasure beholds a principle of love to his God and Saviour, to have been the prime mover and director of all his actions—and that the glory of God was the chief end at which he aimed, and to which all his other views and ends were entirely subservient. He looks back with gratitude and delight to that happy period, when God of his infinite mercy "called him from darkness into his marvel-"lous light;" when unmerited, unsolicited love, laid hold upon him, while he was yet "in the gall "of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity," and rescued him from the jaws of destruction, which "laid "his help upon one mighty to save, and deliver-"ed from going down to the pit." And how inexpressibly sweet, and comfortable, and refreshing does he find such meditations! He looks back

with a holy transport on those delightful moments of fellowship and communion he has enjoyed " with the Father, and with his son Jesus " Christ," in prayer, in meditation, in communicating, upon the gracious returns of prayer which he has from time to time received, upon the gracious manifestations of the light of God's countenance, which have revived his soul in the midst of troubles and difficulties. He looks back likewise upon his failings and imperfections, his sins and his short-comings; but, blessed be his exalted Redeemer, he can look back upon these without terror, for he is washed, and purified, and sanctified in the blood of atonement—and seeing much is forgiven him, he loves the more, he adores and admires the riches of free grace the more—he looks back upon sin as a vanquished slain foe, and consequently unable to do him any farther harm; and beholds death, the enemy he is about to encounter, deprived of the power of doing him harm, and divested of all his boasted terrors, by having his sting plucked out; and if such is the christian's present happy situation, if such is the joy which results from a retrospect of his past life, how infinitely more exalted the joy and happiness of looking forward; this presents to his view a bright, an eternal day without a cloud—the full

and complete enjoyment of every wish, and every desire—the uninterrupted possession of an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that "fadeth not away." The final end of all sorrow, and pain, and disappointment—the final end of all darkness and doubt—the final destruction of sin, and death, and hell—the commencement of never-fading bliss, an immortal "crown of glory, which God the righteous judge shall give "him in that day." The perfect felicity of this state, eternity alone can disclose, "for eye "hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it "entered into the heart of man the things which "God hath prepared for them that love him." Thus, my dear friends, "the righteous hath hope "in his death," all is calm and serene, all is peace and joy, and in this happy tranquillity he expects the glad summons, which is to usher him into the glorious presence of his heavenly Father, where the blessed sentence of approbation waits him: "Well done, thou good and "faithful servant, come, inherit the kingdom "prepared for thee from the foundation of the "world."

But let us, on the other hand, view the dismal situation of the guilty man in the day when God

requireth his life at his hand—when he looks back on his past life, all is horror and despair, without a single ray of hope to lessen the tremendous gloom—how does the remembrance of his open, presumptuous impieties, and of his secret guilt, distract the soul, and make it a terror to itself—with what anguish does he recal to mind his passed impious joys, and finds that they are gone for ever, and when he feels the deep and deadly sting they have left behind—when, like departed ghosts, they arise up in all their hideous forms, and spread terror around on every side, how deep the misery of recollecting precious moments neglected and now for ever lost; golden opportunities squandered away, and never more to return, mercy abused, and to be offered now no more; the motions of the Spirit quenched, never to be revived again; convictions smothered and stifled, never to be renewed; time come to an end; insatiate death pursuing his prey, "like a staunch murderer, steady to his purpose," armed with a mortal sting to kill both soul and body at one dreadful blow, and all this but "the beginning of sorrow"—it is not the separation betwixt the corporeal and immortal parts, it is not the resigning of life, it is not the being torn from this world and its enjoyments, it is

none of these which denominates death the king of terrors; no, it is on account of the awful hereafter, the important consequences with which it is attended, and only on account of these that it is to be dreaded—it is impossible to conceive any thing more awful, than the instantaneous transition of the soul from this world to a world of spirits—how dreadful the leap out of time into eternity—a world of vanities and uncertainties for ever passed away, a world of unknown and unseen realities opened; a state of probation at an end, a state of eternal recompense come—a despised and offended God, now become an awful and a just judge, seated upon the tribunal of eternal justice, and about to pronounce an irreversible doom, which is to adjudge to endless punishment, while the sinful wretch has nothing to plead but guilty, guilty—and all beyond is the blackness of darkness for ever—this is misery inexpressible, inconceivable—is misery such as enraged Omnipotence must be supposed to inflict on impious, obstinate presumption;—and now from the comparison, how great the happiness at a dying hour of "having a conscience void of offence;" how exquisite the misery of being haunted with a guilty one, how vast the difference between the situation of the

real christian and the profane despiser of religion at that trying period.

And now let me conclude this subject with a very short improvement. We have seen that to maintain "a conscience void of offence," is to live in the habitual exercise of all the duties which we owe to God as our creator, preserver, and redeemer, and which we owe to our brethren of mankind, according to the different stations and relations in which we are placed one toward another,—in a word, to live under the vital power of religion—we have seen the happiness of being possessed of a good conscience, and the misery of a contrary state. As we would wish, therefore, to live in peace with ourselves, and with all men, and die in peace with our God, with the well-grounded hope of future glory and happiness, let it be our chief and only study to secure an interest in his favour and love, by approving of our consciences to him in well doing; "and seeing "we have such a great high priest over the "houshold of God," let us have "our consciences "purged from dead works," from the lifeless, ineffectual fruits of our own righteousness, which "is but as filthy rags," and let us be clothed

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with the righteousness of Christ, which alone is all perfect, and all-sufficient. As we are daily conscious of numberless failures and offences, for which conscience needs must reprove us, let it be our daily request at the throne of grace, that the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit may purify our hearts by faith in the Redeemer, and may enlighten our minds in the knowledge of God, and of Christ. Amen

SERMON XXIII.

EPHESIANS ii. 7.

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE.

THE "angels which left their first estate are "reserved in chains under darkness to the judg- "ment of the great day;" but the language of God concerning the guilty race of Adam, who fell from his happy state, and thereby involved himself and his posterity in guilt and misery, was "deli- "ver from going down to the pit, I have found "out a ransom for thee." Astonishing! angels passed by without so much as the offer of mercy; men recovered by an act of grace the most undeserved, the most amazing—here it would seem that the order of things was quite inverted, that this dispensation of God was quite the contrary of what might have been expected, and that for the interests of his glory, the angels

should have been saved, and men condemned to hopeless misery—for man is a weak insignificant creature in comparison of the other, a creature of yesterday; "whose habitation is in the "dust, whose foundation is of clay, who is "crushed before the moth," at the best a worm, the child of corruption; and after he became the child of sin, a serpent full of deadly poison, grovelling in the dust, and deserving to be crushed under the foot of the divine indignation and displeasure. What then was this sinful, mortal creature that he should be preferred of his Maker? Angels, on the other hand, were pure spirits, immortal natures, heavenly substances; the lively, the bright, the glorious images of the great God. Why then give up and destroy so excellent a piece of workmanship, which would have so gloriously magnified the praises of its deliverer? Does not reason pronounce, that angels should have been recovered, and men left to perish in their sins?—perhaps human reason may conclude in this manner, but God, "whose ways are not "as our ways, and whose thoughts are infinitely "above ours," judges in a manner widely different, and unquestionably he has by this means more highly magnified both his justice and his mercy—his justice in detroying the rebellious angels, his mercy in the salvation of guilty man;

for the more noble and exalted the angelic nature, the more did the divine justice manifest itself, by punishing them with inflexible severity; and, on the contrary, the more abject and mean the human race, the more unworthy of the divine care, so much the more glorious is the mercy of God, in making such creatures the objects of his love. Besides, the divine attribute of mercy is farther displayed, if we consider that the salvation of fallen angels would have been only reinstating them in their primitive glory, replacing them in those heavenly regions of which they were originally the inhabitants; and their happiness would have remained the same in kind, though different in degree; but in saving men, God raises them to a state very different from that in which they were at first placed, from a terrestrial to a celestial paradise; from a state which was liable to change, to one which is immoveable, permanent, eternal; from being men to become as gods, by making them partakers of a divine nature, transforming them into the image of his own son, his great design in the stupendous work of man's redemption being, as the apostle expresses in the words of the text, to shew the exceeding riches of his "grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ "Jesus." Let us then, my friends, enter upon

the contemplation of this glorious scheme with gratitude and delight, following our great apostle, the messenger and herald of divine grace; let us mark the holy rapture with which he expresses himself upon this exalted subject, as if just descending from the third heaven, where he had beheld the wondrous treasures of grace and mercy displayed in all their splendor, and that we may, in some degree, enter into his meaning, let us consider the two great objects here presented to us: first, "the exceeding riches of "God's grace," and second, the end of God in this manifestation, namely, that he may shew them "in his kindness towards us, through Christ "Jesus."

First, let us consider the import of the apostle's expression, "the exceeding riches of his grace." Here, my brethren, we have access to treasures which we are permitted not only to look at, but to take from, a sufficiency to supply all our wants; treasures, not such as those of earthly princes; rarities, not such as those which are to be found in the cabinets of the curious, which we are with difficulty suffered to look at, much less to put forth our hand to [illegible] from; but treasures which God opens on purpose for our use, which he requires us to conte[illegible]

without measure, and without a grudge; nay, permits us to take by force, and the more eager the more welcome—we should, therefore, be all eyes to behold the excellence of this rich treasure, all desire to carry off as much of it as we possibly can. We cannot but observe, that the apostle in the text has something great, surpassingly great, upon his mind upon the subject of grace; that he wants to communicate to us an idea of it, which shall at once delight and astonish us—he not only speaks to us of grace, but of "the riches of "grace;" and this phrase in scripture language denotes a very great and large abundance; but he does not rest satisfied even with this aggravation; but, as if unable to express all that he felt, he calls it the "exceeding riches of his grace," to signify an abundance, an excellence beyond conception; he wants to represent the grace of God in all its extent, without measure or boundaries, surpassing all thought or expression, such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath en-"tered into the heart of man;" and in order to judge of it as he does, we must with him consider this grace of God, in his "kindness towards us "through Christ Jesus;" for we must join these two inseparably together, the grace of God, and his kindness in Christ; they are by no means separate and distinct articles, but one and the

same thing; the intention of the apostle being to explain the one by the other, and to shew us in what manner God hath testified to us the infinite riches of his grace, namely, "by his goodness to-"wards us in our Lord Jesus Christ." For it is in this instance, properly, that the grace, the free, unmerited, unsolicited love of God to men is displayed in all its abundance, in all its greatness, in all its excess. He has in many instances, and by various means, discovered his regard for us; but all these are nothing in comparison of his own son Jesus Christ, his greatest best gift, nay, all his other gifts in one. Let us weigh then this grace of God, in the true balance of the sanctuary, and we will find that it truly deserves the epithets which the apostle here gives it.—For in the

First place, if we consider the surpassing worth and value of this gift of God, what can equal it, what can come ever near it, what is there like it in all the treasures of eternity?—God, in the beginning, had given us a world by creating and fitting it up for our use and convenience, and no doubt it was an amazing instance of regard to have made so many glorious creatures on our account, so many bright luminaries to answer the purposes of light and heat to mankind—an earth

so fruitful and agreeable to support us, an air so pure and refined to refresh us, the vast ocean to be the channel of our correspondence and commerce, so many kinds of fruits for our nourishment, so great a number of animals to serve us, all the parts of the universe combined to administer to our wants, our comforts, and our pleasures; this was unquestionably a most surprising expression of love, but this was not "the exceeding "riches of the grace of God." He had something greater and better to bestow upon us than a world—and why should it be reckoned arrogance to say the earth, nay, the universe, was made for us, when God has undeniably bestowed upon us what is infinitely more, his Son, his own Son, "who is God over all, and blessed for ever;" his Son, who alone is of more value than ten thousand worlds, for ten thousand times ten thousand worlds would still be bounded and finite; but the eternal Son of God is altogether infinite, possessing in himself all the immensity of the divine nature? What is a world but the breath of his mouth, the effect of a single word, the sea but as "the small drop in the bucket," the earth as "the small dust in the balance?" What is the sun, but the shadow of his eternal light, and the heaven but as the veil and curtain of his glory. To have given us his Son then, is not only grace, but

the riches of his grace, nay, "the exceeding riches "of his grace;" seeing there is nothing equal or like to this in all the treasures of mercy and love, which will appear farther, if we consider in the

Second place, in what manner God has bestowed his Son upon us. For had he sent him here below to save us in all the dazzling splendor of an angel, with the majesty of a king, with the pomp and glory of a conqueror, still we should have been infinitely indebted to him for making his Son leave heaven's glory to come into our world, to break our bands and deliver us from our misery; but herein shines the excess, the superabundance of the divine grace and love—that the "Ancient of days" should become a babe of a day old, that "the mighty God, the everlast-"ing Father," who is for ever blessed, should become "a man of sorrows," that "the Prince of "Peace," "the Lord of the kings of the earth," nay, the Lord of angels, should be born of a mean woman, in a stable, and laid in a manger,—that "the heir of all things" should be "without a "place to lay his head," or a morsel of bread to support nature, and that the fountain and giver of life to all creatures should terminate his own in the most painful and ignominious manner, nailed to a cross—here all our thoughts are lost,

and swallowed up in an abyss of incomprehensible love, of which we are unable to measure the height, or sound the depth, or to conceive the length and breadth, for "it passeth all understanding." Parents naturally love their children as the lively images of themselves, as part of their own blood, as partakers of their own substance, as living pictures in which they hear, and see, and know, and love themselves—but never was earthly son beloved of a father as the eternal Son of God was of his; for earthly children have an existence out of, and distinct from their parents; but Christ was "in the Father, "and the Father in him," so as to make but one and the same essence with him. Betwixt parents and children there is always some difference, however near the resemblance may be; but Christ "was the brightness of the Father's glory, and "the express image of his person," so that to see him was to see the Father. Children have many faults and imperfections which frequently relax the ardour of a father's love; but Christ, the great Redeemer, was all perfect, was perfection itself, and it was as his "meat and drink to "do the will of his heavenly Father." What then must have been the inconceivable love of God to men, when he spared not such a son, but "gave him up for us all," an only son, the son of

his love, in whom he was ever well pleased—that he should reduce him to such a state of abasement in order to exalt us; that he should impoverish him, that we "through his poverty might "be made rich;" that he should permit him to be covered with reproach, that we might be clothed with glory; that he should wound him, that by his stripes we might be healed, and by his sorrow be made glad; and give him up to die upon a cross, that we might be recovered to eternal life? "Now, know I," saith God to Abraham, "that thou fearest God, seeing thou "hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, "from me." But Abraham owed his son to God; God owed us nothing. Abraham had received his son from God by an extraordinary and supernatural effect of his power; God held his, only of himself. Abraham could not have retained his son, had it pleased the Almighty to take him away—but what power in heaven or in earth could have robbed the Father of his well-beloved Son? Abraham, in offering up his son a sacrifice, performed an act of obedience as well as of love; but God, in giving his Son to death, performed a miracle purely of mercy and love: behold then again in this, the riches, "the ex-"ceeding riches of the grace of God." And farther let us consider, in the

Third place, the state of those creatures to whom God gave his Son as a new subject of admiration, wherein we may discover more of the amazing riches of free grace. Had God sent his eternal Son into the world to be our head and king, while man remained in a state of innocence, had we retained the original purity and perfection of our nature, it would have been a great, a distinguishing favour; but to give him for sinful men, for criminal ungrateful creatures, for heaven-daring rebels, the objects of abhorrence and of indignation, is a dispensation of the riches of grace, which we can never sufficiently prize and esteem. "In this," says the apostle, "in this, "above all things else, has God commended his "love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, "Christ died for us." The more unworthy and hateful any object is, the more remarkable are the goodness and mercy which confer any favour upon it, and to love one's enemies is the last and highest effort of charity. To love our friends is but justice and gratitude; to love our parents or children, is only natural tenderness and affection; to love and do good to strangers is but the ordinary duty of humanity; to love and relieve the poor, and such as we expect nothing from in return, and from whom we have received no services, is at the best but kindness and generosity;

but to love our enemies, who hate us mortally, and who are insolently outrageous against us, is a pitch of goodness of which human nature is hardly capable, for "scarcely for a righteous man "will one die." What thanks then are due to that God, who has loved us so much as to give his most precious gift to us while we stood in the character of guilty miserable offenders, who had rendered ourselves his declared enemies by our wicked apostacy from him. It was this which made the apostle John so much admire this boundless love of God: "God," says he, "so loved "the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in him should not "perish, but have everlasting life;"—he beheld the cause, the spring of this amazing benefit, in the free love of God, and in that alone; for it was not that we loved God; no, our hearts were utterly estranged from him; by being under the influence of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, we were become the slaves of sin, enemies by wicked works, and "without God in "the world." It was not then because we loved God, but that he loved us. Had he been given to be the prince and lord of angels, those pure spirits which stand continually before God, ready to execute his commands, they are holy and elevated, and might have served to reflect the bright-

ness and splendour of his glory; but that he should be given for the guilty, miserable, sin-enslaved race of Adam, who had merited all his vengeance, is what confounds, at the same time that it should ravish our minds; for here we see the great God freely bestowing the most inestimably precious thing he could give, and bestowing it upon an object of all others the most unworthy of such a grace. And in the

Fourth and last place, what puts the finishing stroke to, what fills up the measure of this exceeding riches of the grace of God, which he has made known "in his kindness towards us through "Christ Jesus," is, that he has in him carried his mercy and love to us as far as they can possibly go. What an infinite difference betwixt all his other gifts, and those which he bestows upon us in Christ Jesus! What gave he in a state of nature to those who lived simply under his government, that is, to the heathen world? Nothing but the good things, the fruits of the earth only, the riches of the world; and all that he did for those whom he inclined to distinguish and favour above others, was to give them the sceptres, the crowns, and the dignities of a mortal state, in a frail, transient, fading existence, which, after a few years of mixed pleasure and pain, vanished

away like a shadow, passed like a flash of lightning, which loses itself in eternal night. What gave he under the law to those who were the objects of that dispensation? The milk and honey of an earthly Canaan; the dainties, the blessings, and advantages of that delightful country, where death reigned as over the rest of the world, and whose happiness was of no longer duration than in the other parts of the earth. What did he give, even in a state of innocence, before the fall? A happiness indeed, which might have been immortal, by man's continuing in obedience to his Maker. But where and in what place? Upon this earth, among the flowers and rivers of a terrestrial paradise, the common habitation of other inferior animals, where life would have been still gross and sensual, and dependent upon animal functions, which would still have retained us somewhat upon a level with the lower part of the creation. This is all the length the goodness of God reached out of Jesus Christ. But of what glorious extent, quality, and degree does it appear in our great Redeemer! for in him he promises us, and gives us at the last, not earth but heaven, not time but eternity, not the happiness and pleasure of animals, but the bliss, the rapture of angels; not the sceptres, and crowns, and possessions of this world, but "a crown of glory, a scep-

"tre of righteousness, an inheritance incorruptible "and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." He gives us a life, not of a few years amidst the sweets of a Canaan, as to the Israelites of old, nor of an eternity in a low and earthly paradise, as to our first parents in the beginning of things; but a life altogether without comparison, without end as to its duration, without measure as to its rich abundance, without bounds as to its glory, without example or similitude as to its bliss, without interruption of its joys and delights; a life altogether such as that of God himself—for like him, we shall have heaven for our habitation, angels, the sons of light, for our companions, immortality for our clothing, glory for our crown, the possession of all things for our inheritance, "when we shall come unto mount Sion, and unto "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jeru- "salem, and to an innumerable company of "angels; to the general assembly and church of "the first born, which are written in heaven, and "to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just "men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator "of the new covenant. In the presence of God "there is fulness of joy, at his right hand there "are pleasures for evermore." May he bless the word which has now been spoken. Amen.

SERMON XXIV.

2 CORINTHIANS, vii. 1.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

THE PROMISES OF GOD, AN INCITEMENT TO HOLINESS.

"BLESSED are the pure in heart," saith our Lord, "for they shall see God;" and the Psalmist's character of the true worshipper of God, and of the proper inhabitant of Zion, is, "he that "hath clean hands and a pure heart;" and whoever aspires at the glorious relations contained in the promises mentioned in my text, must, in order thereto, "cleanse himself from all filthiness "of flesh and spirit." In discoursing from this subject, I propose,

I. To open up the nature of these promises.

II. To explain the qualification necessary for receiving them, or what we are to understand by being "cleansed from all filthiness of the "flesh and spirit."

III. By way of improvement, to shew the influence the hope of the promises should have upon our minds. I am,

First, To open up the nature of the promises referred to in the text. The first which occurs is that made to the chosen people of God of old, in case of obedience, recorded in Leviticus, "I will walk among you, and will be your God, "and ye shall be my people*." When we look back to the first period of this world, and take a survey of our grand parent in all the dignity of wisdom and innocence, qualified for the enjoyment, and actually enjoying the friendly, the gracious presence and converse of his Maker, with what humble rapture must our hearts burn within us, to view our nature in so glorious, so elevated a condition; to view God himself, the greatest and the best of beings, condescending to the lowness of his own creature, vouchsafing to be his guardian, his companion, his guide, his friend. Again, when we observe the fatal change that soon took place, and view that same Almighty Being become the enemy and the judge of his guilty creature, what dismal prospects present themselves to us, what gloomy reflections crowd upon the mind; we behold ourselves fallen

* Lev. xxvi. 12.

from a heaven of bliss to an abyss of woe, till we are again raised by the glorious hope of restoration to that blissful state by the promise here addressed, not to one tribe or nation, but to all who with us are partakers of this heavenly calling, and have the gracious offers of peace, pardon, and reconciliation proclaimed in their ears. The import of this promise then is, "I will walk among you, I will be a wall round "about you, that no enemy shall dare to ap- "proach you, and the glory in the midst of you, "no plague shall come nigh you, nor any evil "befal you. I will walk among you as your "guide, your teacher and instructor, to point "out the way wherein you ought to walk, to "make my path plain before your face. I will "be among you as your exceeding great reward, "abundantly supplying all your wants, and re- "lieving you from all distresses. I will walk "among you as your inspector and judge, to "encourage you in the practice of duty, and to "deter you from acting contrary thereto. And "I will be your God, your God as at the begin- "ning, your merciful creator, your almighty "friend, your never-failing support, your saviour "and deliverer. Fear thou not, therefore, for I "am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy "God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help

" thee, yea I will uphold thee by the right-hand " of my righteousness: and ye shall be my peo- " ple, my people as at the beginning, my favour- " ite creatures, my beloved children, my pur- " chased, my ransomed, my chosen ones; nay, I " will dwell in you, take up my abode with you, " not for a day, not for a short visit only; but no " len gth of time, not eternity itself, shall be able " to make a separation; neither death, nor life, " nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor " things present, nor things to come, nor height, " nor depth, nor any other creature, shall ever " separate you from my love."

The other promise, upon which I design chiefly to dwell at present, is that referred to by the apostle as contained in the book of the prophet Jeremiah*: " I will be a father to you, and ye shall " be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Al- " mighty. Behold, what manner of love hath " the father bestowed upon us, that we should be " called the sons of God." The glory, the happiness of such a relation, what language can express, what heart conceive? This promise contains the three following particulars; 1. Fatherly affection; 2. Fatherly care; 3. Fatherly pity and compassion.

* Jer. xxxi. 9.

First, Fatherly affection.—This appears in what God has already done for his people: "God so loved the world that he gave his only "begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him "might not perish, but have eternal life. Here-"in is love, not that we loved God, but that he "loved us, and gave his son to die for us: when "there was no other eye to pity, no other hand "that could help, then our God wrought deli-"verance for us, and laid our help upon one that "is mighty to save."—When there was nothing in us to attract his love, when, in the language of the prophet, we were "cast out into the open "field," like a helpless new born infant polluted in its own blood, then "he passed by and saw "us polluted in our blood," and his passing by was a time of love, and he said to us when in this deplorable condition, "Live." God's love to his children farther appears in what he is still doing for them, not only in bestowing upon them the common blessings of his providence, in "giving "them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, "filling their hearts with food and gladness;" but in those peculiar communications of his favour and love, that peculiar light of his countenance, whereby they are cheered in the midst of worldly afflictions and distresses, whereby they are raised above the world, and the enjoyments

it affords; whereby they are assured that "God "is, and that he will be the rewarder of them "that diligently seek him;"—in a word, whereby they know that they are "at peace with God "through the Lord Jesus Christ," and consequently at peace with themselves, and with all around them. Farther, God's love to his children appears in what he assuredly will do for them; he has promised to "be their guide even "unto death, and through death;" has promised the assistance of his holy spirit, to enable them to perform every part of duty, to overcome every temptation, to surmount every danger, and every difficulty—he has prepared for them "an inhe-"ritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fa-"deth not away, eternal in the heavens," has laid up for them stores of glory and bliss, which "eye "hath not seen, ear hath not heard, which it "hath not entered into the heart of man to con-"ceive," much less is the tongue of man able to describe. This promise implies in the

Second place, Fatherly care. When we come into this world, the care of our natural parents or relations is absolutely necessary for the preservation of our life, our condition then being most feeble and helpless—for this end, nature has implanted in parents a principle of the greatest ten-

derness and concern for their offspring, which prompts them in the strongest manner to provide for their safety and happiness in every thing—such, and infinitely greater, is the tender care which God exercises over all his children; he loves to exhibit himself to us under such characters as are expressive of it: "Can a woman forget her "sucking child, that she should not have com-"passion on the son of her womb? yea, they may "forget, yet will not I forget thee. The moun-"tains shall depart, and the hills be removed, "but my kindness shall not depart from thee, "neither shall the covenant of my peace be re-"moved, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. "He giveth his angels charge concerning them, "to keep them in all their ways," so that they are ever safe and happy; "the Almighty him-"self is their refuge, underneath and round about "them continually are the everlasting arms. "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but "they that wait upon the Lord shall not want "any good thing."

In the third place, the promise of God's being a father to us, implies fatherly pity and compassion, which are exercised in general toward the whole human race, in providing for their recovery when lost and undone creatures,

in those tender expostulations he makes with them on account of their madness in choosing "death rather than life," misery rather than happiness; in those pathetic invitations to repentance, and those expressive and repeated declarations of his willingness to receive and forgive them. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that "the wicked turn from his way and live: turn "ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will "ye die? let the wicked man forsake his way, "and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and "turn unto the Lord and he will have mercy "upon him, and to our God for he will abun-"dantly pardon."

But the fatherly pity of God is in a peculiar manner expressed toward his own children, and particularly, in the first place, when he calls them "from darkness to light, from the "power of Satan to himself," when all is dark and gloomy about the guilty creature; if he looks up, his eyes are presented with the most awful of objects, the dread tribunal of an incensed God, ready to take vengeance upon him; if he casts his eyes downward, behold the place of torment about to open its mouth and swallow him up: within, all is storm and tempest, an awakened conscience, raging "like the troubled sea which

"cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and "dirt," and all the terrors of the Lord are ready to break in upon the polluted soul. Then the Lord relents and pities; and, ere the avenger of blood overtakes, spreads wide open the gates of the city of refuge, receives the wretched criminal, and speaks words of peace, and comfort, and pardon unto him.

Secondly, God pities his children in their backslidings after conversion; he does not finally reject them, though they "fall from their first love." No, this is not the part of a father to a child, "he "knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we "are dust;" he pities our ignorance, and instructeth us; he pities our weakness, and administereth strength; he pities us when fallen down, and raiseth us up; nay, he is not wearied out with our continued provocations against him, but still "waiteth that he may be gracious;" is ever more ready to receive his backslidden children than they are to return to him.

Thirdly, God pities his children when struggling with temptation: he knows the cunning, power, and malice of their enemies, and how unable they are to withstand them; he knows their own proneness to what is forbidden, their readiness to sink under a temptation, and there-

fore, like a wise and compassionate father, who sees his beloved child in danger, whether from the violence of others, or from his own folly and inconsideration, disappoints the malice of the foe, and delivers his poor creature ofttimes even against his own inclination. "He will not "suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, "but will with the temptation also make a way "to escape, that we may be able to bear it." In the

Fourth place, God pities his children, when labouring under outward trouble and affliction: when streams of creature comfort are dried up, inward and divine consolations are made much more to abound: nay, those very afflictions which are so grievous to nature, and which are looked upon as the wounds of an enemy, not as the chastisements of a tender-hearted father, are really the effect of pity and love. God knows how much we are attached to time, and the things thereof, and that this alone were sufficient to undo us; and therefore, in pity to our souls, he takes away "the desire of the heart and of the "eyes," to shew us the folly of seeking our happiness, and setting up our rest in this world. The skilful physician does not skin over the green wound, but probes to the bottom of it, and cuts off every remainder of infection how-

ever painful it may be to the patient, lest an unseasonable pity should kill where it was designed to cure. "Though our outward man decay," says the apostle, "yet our inward man is re-"newed day by day; and though the tabernacle, "the outward house," is shattered and broken down, yet if the inward inhabitant is proportionally strengthened, the exchange is not to be complained of; for though "no chastening for "the present be joyous, but grievous, neverthe-"less afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of "righteousness unto them which are exercised "thereby." In the

Fifth and last place, God pities his children, at the hour of death, when an eternal world is ready to open upon them in all its awful solemnity, when nature recoils and stands shuddering on the brink; "his staff and his rod comforteth "them, when passing through the dark valley"—when this world and all its enjoyments are flying away, when "lover and friend stand at a dis-"tance," the Almighty God himself, their never-failing friend, takes them by the hand, carries them in his arms, and, ere they are aware, ushers them into the regions of eternal day—then it is that this exceeding great and precious promise is fully accomplished. God is not ashamed to be called their God, and father, and to own them for

his children, and accordingly, as his children and heirs, puts them in possession of their inheritance, of that inheritance which he their heavenly Father had prepared, which Christ their elder brother had purchased, which their faith had believed in, and to the expectation of which their hope had raised them. "It doth not yet appear what we shall "be, but we know that when he shall appear, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he "is." Thus have I endeavoured to open up the nature of the promises referred to in the text. I now proceed to the

Second head, to explain the qualification necessary for being partakers in these promises, namely, holiness, or being cleansed from "all fil- "thiness of the flesh and spirit."

From the former epistle to the church of Corinth, and the preceding chapter of this, we may gather, that the sins the Corinthians were chiefly addicted to, were idolatry, intemperance, and uncleanness; the first of which may not improperly be termed "filthiness" or impurity "of spirit," and the two last "filthiness of the flesh;" and it is not improbable that the apostle might have these chiefly in his view in the exhortation of the text, however he expresses himself at large, with-

out condescending on any one, or any particular number of vices: let us cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness. The word "spirit" is here taken to signify the inward, mental part of man; those secret recesses of the soul which are penetrable only by the eye of the Deity. The scripture represents the soul of man as polluted and diseased by sin, in the same manner as the body is by any loathsome, noxious distemper, "from the "sole of the foot, even unto the head," saith the prophet Isaiah, "there is no soundness in it, but "wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; the "whole head is sick, and the whole heart is "faint:" and our Saviour himself saith, "out of "the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adul-"teries, fornications, thefts, false-witness, blas-"phemies, these are the things which defile a "man." The purity, and health, and perfection of the human soul, consist in an enlightened understanding, a will conformed to the great standard of purity, and affections regular and undefiled. Filthiness or impurity of spirit therefore, as it regards the first grand faculty of the mind, is that ignorance, error, and prejudice, under which the human understanding lies buried. Though "life and immortality" are now clearly "brought "to light," yet the bulk of mankind remain wholly ignorant of their truest and most impor-

tant interests; they remain ignorant of God, ignorant of themselves, ignorant of true happiness, of consequence they fall into numberless and fatal errors, whereby the soul is betrayed into a situation the most fearful and dangerous. They imagine "God is altogether such an one as themselves," and therefore, neither to be feared nor loved. They are clean in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness; they imagine themselves "rich, and increased in "goods," and to stand in need of nothing, and "know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" their cry is, "who will shew us any good?" no matter who is the giver, or what the gift, if it serves the present turn. Hence they catch at shadows, and follow after dreams; they eagerly pursue the unsatisfying pleasures of sin, which are but for a moment, and despise those solid, those substantial joys which are durable, which are eternal. The third defilement of the understanding is prejudice, which weakens its vigour, renders it proof against reason, truth, and sense, and fortifies it in ignorance. It is a very peculiar weakness of human nature to imagine it a mean thing to confess having been in a mistake, and to renounce an opinion we have once entertained; whereas, in reality, nothing discovers more genuine greatness

of mind than the contrary conduct. Next to not having erred at all, is to acknowledge and forsake error, when known, as it is next to being innocent to confess, repent, and amend. Again, filthiness or impurity, as it regards the will, consists in that propensity to what is forbidden, and that aversion to what is our duty, which are so natural to man; this necessarily follows from the corruption of the understanding, just now described, dressing up vice in a form so attracting and lovely, and giving religion an appearance so forbidding and unlovely, as to make the former an object of desire, the other of disgust.—The will of necessity must make choice of good, real or apparent, for its object; but this faculty is so unhappily disposed by the perversion it has undergone, as to embrace unthinkingly the most fatal of evils, under the appearance of the greatest good; to grasp at the shadow and let go the substance. In the third place, impurity or filthiness of spirit consists of disordered and impure affections. The passions were implanted in the human breast for the wisest and noblest purposes, as prompters and assistants to virtue; but they too are by their perversion become the advocates of vice—from being the life and vigour of the soul, are become its diseases and plagues; one like a raging fever, another like a pining consumption, and a third

like a nauseous leprosy, by turns, tosses, wastes, and pollutes it. Besides, it is very observable, that there is in every heart some one reigning domineering passion, which may peculiarly be called its own; this the apostle to the Hebrews calls, "the sin that doth so easily beset us," which never fails to triumph over us. So long, therefore, as the soul is under subjection to any of these, it must be very unfit to become an inhabitant of those mansions into which nothing that is impure, or that defileth, can enter—to enjoy the promise of being made "the child of God," of that Being who is "of purer eyes" than to look upon sinners without abhorrence

Second, by filthiness of the flesh, we are to understand the actual outbreakings of those corrupted affections, whereby the body as well as the mind is discomposed, troubled, and often destroyed; it is the real and open productions of anger, lust, and ambition, of malice, envy, and pride, and such like, which are the occasion of all that disorder we observe in the world; which are the destruction of kingdoms, societies, and individuals; which make men resemble damned spirits, and this earth resemble hell. It were endless to recount all the corruptions of heart and life, which every hour present themselves to our

notice, both in ourselves and others, owing to the want of that original rectitude of our nature which the great author of it implanted in it at its first creation, which was lost by the fall, and for the recovery of which the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, lived, suffered, and died. Having thus explained what we are to understand by the expression "filthiness of the flesh "and spirit," it will appear upon a very short survey, wherein consists the "holiness" here recommended;—in one word, it consists in being purified from all the disorder, pollution, and corruption just mentioned, in "putting off the old "man," according to the expression of the apostle, "which is corrupt according to the lusts of "the flesh, and in putting on the new man which "after God is created in righteousness and true "holiness;" in recovering that image of the Deity which was the glory and happiness of man at his first creation, in having the understanding cleared of error and prejudice, the will renewed and brought to a conformity to the divine will, the affections reduced within their proper bounds, and brought into obedience to the dictates of reason and conscience, and "the body sprinkled "as with pure water;" the life and actions regulated according to that holy, and just, and good law of God, which is the standard of all perfec-

tion. That such perfect purity is not to be attained in this world will be readily allowed; at the same time it is no less certain, that whoever expects to have any interest in the promises already explained, will be convinced of the necessity of being "renewed in the spirit of the mind," and in the tenour of the life.—Which leads me to the

Third head, namely, by way of improvement, to shew the influence which the hope of the promises should have upon our minds. "He that "hath this hope in him," saith the apostle John, writing upon the same subject, "purifieth him- "self even as he is pure:" has God promised to be our God, to dwell in us, and walk among us? has he promised to be our father, and to bestow upon us all the blessings and privileges of such a relation, and do we hope and wish for the accomplishment of those gracious promises? is it our chief desire and ambition to be called the sons of God, and to be "heirs of that kingdom "which is prepared for his children from the "foundation of the world?" into it, we are assured that nothing which is impure can enter, for "with- "out are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, "and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever "loveth and maketh a lie:" if then, we have this

glorious hope, it will lead us to comply with the exhortation of the text, to "cleanse ourselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." By our fatal apostacy from God, the strength as well as the beauty of the soul was destroyed and lost, man became a weak, as well as a guilty, creature; his appetites and passions, which were designed to be under the direction of reason, usurped the mastery, and continue to counteract and controul its dictates, and to rectify the disorders thereby occasioned, is what we are here called to. It may be laid down as a self-evident proposition, that no person in a natural unrenewed state has any inclination for being a partaker of these promises, and of course no desire after that purity which alone qualifies for it: it is no less certain, that no person whatever, unassisted by the grace of God, is able to attain this purity, our very righteousness, our best works being "as "filthy rags" in the sight of God; as human nature is wholly corrupted, whatever flows from an impure source must of course be impure, for "a "corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." It is they, and they only, who by grace are "re-"newed in the spirit of their mind," who have "their fruit unto holiness," and to such only therefore can the apostle's exhortation be addressed.

Seeing then that we have neither righteousness nor strength of our own, the hope of these promises will naturally engage us, laying aside all confidence in ourselves, to seek to be "clothed "upon" with the perfect righteousness of the blessed Redeemer, and humbly to implore the Father of Mercies, that "Christ may of God be "made to us wisdom and righteousness, and "sanctification, and redemption;" at the same time, making it our constant and sincere endeavour to "walk even as he walked;" imitating that example which he has set us, and transcribing into our life and conversation, those perfections which we are capable of copying;—"exer-"cising ourselves constantly in this, to maintain "a conscience void of offence toward God, and "toward all men," that when we come to die, we may "have this for our rejoicing; the testimony "of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly "sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the "grace of God; we have had our conversation "in the world," and seeing it is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom: "let us conti-"nue stedfast, immovable, always abounding in "the work of the Lord; for as much as we know "that our labour shall not be in vain in the "Lord."

SERMON XXV.

LUKE xiii. 6—9.

He spake also this parable: A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE.

IT never was, nor could be, the intention of the all-wise Creator of the world to send any of his creatures into it, especially those endued with reason and understanding, merely to fill up places, for no higher end than to act the part of idle spectators, and to pass their existence in a state of listless, stupid inaction; much less to indulge at will their passions and appetites to the dishonour of God, the disgrace of human nature, the offence of society, and their own utter de-

struction. It was never for such low and unworthy, such wicked and impious purposes, that man was made "wiser than the beasts of the "earth, and endued with more understanding "than the fowls of heaven;" but the command of the supreme Lord of Nature to all his intelligent creatures, and in a particular manner to those who enjoy the advantages of the gospel revelation, is that of the nobleman to his servants in the parable, "Occupy till I come: behold I "have bestowed upon you such and such gifts "and talents; be careful to improve them to the "best advantage, and do not either profusely "squander them away, nor suffer them to lie by "neglected and unimproved:" and in the passage just now read, our Lord by a representation borrowed from ordinary life, gives his hearers a very striking view of the imminent danger they were in, if they continued to misimprove or neglect those means of grace and salvation, which through the goodness and long-suffering of God they were favoured with.

All I shall say in explication of the parable, as its meaning is abundantly obvious, is, that by the owner of the vineyard is to be understood God himself, the great author and proprietor of the universe and of all things therein: by the

gardener or dresser of the vineyard, is to mean Jesus Christ, the gracious mediator betwixt God and man, and by the barren fig tree, every indolent, hypocritical, or wicked member of Christ's visible church. The text then, presents us with the following particulars:—First, with a view of our own natural degeneracy, worthlessness, and unprofitableness, under the image of a fig tree, cumbering or uselessly occupying the ground. Second, of the patience and forbearance of God toward sinners, in delaying the execution of his justice upon them, notwithstanding their continuing fruitlessness, under the notion of the owner of a vineyard's coming year by year in expectation of fruit from a tree which persists in barrenness, and as long suspending the destruction of it. Third, it gives us an awful representation of the justice and severity of God, toward impenitent sinners, by his coming at last to the resolution of cutting down, of utterly destroying the useless, unprofitable trunk, as being a mere occupier of space, a cumberer of the ground. And fourth, we have a most endearing representation of the gracious intercession of our blessed Redeemer, in the dresser of the vineyard's interceding with the master, in behalf of a favourite tree, of which, though for the present barren, he still would entertain good hopes of. In discoursing,

therefore, more at large from this subject, I shall, as God is pleased to enable me, consider each of these particulars in order, and then endeavour to lead to the improvement of the subject.

The first particular, which will occupy your time at present, is the view we have of our own natural degeneracy, worthlessness, and unprofitableness, under the image of a fig tree cumbering or uselessly occupying the ground. "I had "planted thee," says God to his ancient people, by his prophet Jeremiah, "I had planted thee a "noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art "thou turned into a degenerate plant of a "strange vine unto me?"

When man came out of the hands of his Creator in all the dignity of spotless innocence, and enlarged understanding, and was placed in the midst of the delightful garden, the sovereign, the happy lord of this lower creation; while as yet sin was unknown, but nature and holiness were the same thing; while as yet the law of God was the study and delight of his rational creature; while reason and practice went hand in hand, and conscience smiled approbation on every action; while as yet no ignorance, error, or prejudice clouded the understanding, no perverseness

or corruption domineered in the will; no disorder reigned in the affections, but the human soul was a transcript of the purity of the eternal mind, then it was that this glorious, this blessed, because innocent, creature, might be said in the descriptive language of the psalmist to resemble "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that "bringeth forth his fruit in his season." But now, alas, how widely different is the case, how is the glory departed! "Man that was in honour "continued not: how is the crown fallen from "our head, how is the gold become dim, and the "most fine gold changed." The present state of man is so widely different from that of primitive holiness and integrity, the constitution of his nature was so totally overturned by his fatal apostacy from his Maker, sin like a loathsome leprosy marring the beauty and wasting the strength of the human soul, that the once glorious and perfect child of God is hardly discoverable in the now guilty, polluted slave of sin and Satan—confusion has succeeded in the place of order, deformity in that of beauty and innocence, guilt, remorse, and fear have occupied the room of purity, peace, and filial love, and confidence; in a word, to adopt the language of the prophet, "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart "faint: from the sole of the foot even unto the

" head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds " and bruises, and putrifying sores." But to keep close to the resemblance which the text points out, let us proceed to enquire in what particulars professing christians may be likened to a barren fig tree, cumbering, fruitlessly occupying the ground. And from the letter of the parable we may observe, that by the owner of the vineyard's visiting the tree from year to year in expectation of fruit, it is reasonably to be supposed, that it had afforded some outward appearance of fruitfulness, had given some signs of a future crop, such as budding, blossoming, and sending forth leaves. In this view of the text, the hypocrite is the character peculiarly designed: the parable alludes to those who fill a space in Christ's visible church, who " come before God as his people cometh," who put on every form and appearance of religion, but remain destitute of the power of it, and against such is the awful sentence in the text denounced.

But we may view the text under another aspect, and suppose that by a barren fig tree is here meant, a dry, withered, sapless trunk, without either the appearance or reality of fruit, upon which all the influences of the heavens make no sort of impression; then, the character repre-

sented is that of careless, indolent, lifeless hearers of the gospel, who notwithstanding all the means of grace, which are showered down in so great abundance upon them, still remain hard and impenitent, indifferent and unconcerned.—It is not to be doubted but our Saviour meant to design both these characters. We shall, therefore, consider each of them by itself, under this separate view.

That all who profess christianity are not really christians, is a truth too obvious to need any demonstration—for the first of the classes of unprofitable hearers of the gospel now mentioned, namely, that of hypocrites, includes but too great a number of the frequenters of our religious assemblies; as under it may be comprehended, at least, all those whose lives are visibly inconsistent with the profession of religion, with the genius and spirit of that gospel which they pretend to believe, by giving their personal attendance upon some of its ordinances—perhaps by their talking and arguing in defence of it, and even by recommending it to the choice of others. For we can easily suppose—and there really are such characters in abundance, through every corner of the land—we can easily suppose, I say, a man who is able to support with warmth, nay, with judgment

and good sense, the truth, importance, and high advantages of our holy religion in general, and inculcate its particular doctrines with earnestness and zeal, and yet his life at the very same time may be a flat contradiction to those tenets which he so vigorously maintains. We meet with people every day who would take it very heinously amiss to have their knowledge in religious matters called in question; who, notwithstanding, make no sort of scruple to live in the habitual neglect of the plainest and most obvious duties of religion, and in open contradiction to, and contempt of, its most important precepts; many who would not for the world desert religion in the way of argument, who in their practice dispense with its most sacred obligations, by committing all manner of iniquity with greediness. But we may justly suppose the character to go a great deal farther—there are many who not only defend the truth and doctrines of christianity with ardour, and give their testimony in its favour as a recommendation to others, but are likewise abundantly diligent and regular in the observance of its more obvious duties, and in keeping at the utmost distance from the more enormous vices it forbids: we may even suppose a person of this character going the length of performing, with a scrupulous exactness, the public, the private, nay, the secret

duties of religion, and carefully abstaining from all appearance of evil; and yet, pity it is, all this may take place, where a heart-felt love to God and religion is wholly wanting—it is the heart chiefly, it is the heart only that God seeks, this is the fruit he expects and requires; without this, it is in vain to think of pleasing him: every thing else is but blossom and leaves, liable to be nipped and blasted by every transient storm of affliction, opposition, or persecution for Christ's sake and the gospel's—and which may fall off untimely, and no fruit ensue correspondent to so fair a prospect. We find God himself exhibiting a charge to this purpose against his ancient people by the prophet Isaiah: "This people draw "near me with their mouth, and with their lips "do they honour me, but have removed their "heart far from me." Would to God, the Christian church were not chargeable in the same manner.

The hypocrite is the most unaccountable character in nature. To see a person submit to what must be to him a slavery, a mere drudgery, the performance of a certain and constant round of duties—to see him practise a thousand acts of mortification and self-denial for the sake of what he does not love: to be obliged always to sup-

port a character he does not comprehend, and which must, of course, sit very uneasy upon him. In a word, to see one doing that with trouble and constraint, which might be done with ease and delight, bestowing more labour to acquire the semblance, than would be sufficient to arrive at the substance—to see one possessed of such an extravagant degree of folly, is more than reason can account for, even from the present corrupted state of human nature. Such a person must be sensible, as his practice evinces, that religion is of the last consequence; he must be convinced that he himself is under certain obligations to attend to it; but his conviction, alas! does not go deep enough to engage his heart in the cause. Hence there cannot be such a thing as stedfastness or uniformity in his conduct: as his aim is to obtain rather the approbation of the world, the good opinion of his fellow men, than of God and his own conscience—his conduct still pointing invariably to this loadstone, must be like the humours and opinions of men, fluctuating and unstable. Of course there can be no "growth "in grace," no "fruit unto holiness;" for the root from which alone these can spring is a principle of faith in the Redeemer, even a "faith "that worketh by love, that purifieth the heart, "and that overcometh the world:" to which the

hypocrite must of necessity be a stranger. And it is of some importance, surely, for us to enquire how far such a character may belong to ourselves, and to be diligent, honest, and impartial in making such an enquiry, as there is no point in which we are more apt to deceive ourselves than this.—Nothing is more common than to see men without scruple or ceremony accuse others of hypocrisy, however chargeable with presumption such a conduct may be, and however inconsistent with that spirit of "charity" which "thinketh no "evil;" but too, too seldom do we find ourselves disposed to call in question, to suspect our own sincerity, though we are undoubtedly at greater liberty and much better qualified to examine into, and determine upon our own conduct and its motives, than that of any other person. Let us beware of imagining, therefore, that because we may have got our heads filled with a number of speculative notions respecting religion, or because we are able to talk with fluency, and reason with precision upon it, that we are therefore truly religious; but let us ever carry about with us a spirit of humility and self-denial, a deep sense of the weakness of our own understanding, of the small extent of our knowledge, of the worthlessness and inefficacy of all our performances—and by this mark may we try ourselves—unless we

see the utmost need of being deeply humbled in the sight of a holy and righteous God, be our attainments what they will, if our superior knowledge or stricter practice tends to inspire us with a good opinion of ourselves, and leads us to judge or despise others as being less holy than we, then we have the greatest reason to conclude that all is false and hollow—that, with all our fine appearances and professions, we are no better than barren cumberers of the ground. This is beautifully illustrated by our Lord in his parable of the pharisee and the publican, recorded in the eighteenth chapter of this same gospel, with the reading of which I shall conclude this part of my discourse: "And he spake this parable unto cer-
"tain which trusted in themselves that they were
"righteous, and despised others: two men went
"up into the temple to pray, the one a pharisee
"and the other a publican. The pharisee stood
"and prayed thus with himself: God I thank thee,
"that I am not as other men are, extortioners,
"unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I
"fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that
"I possess. And the publican, standing afar off,
"would not lift up so much as his eyes unto
"heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God
"be merciful to me a sinner*."

* Luke xviii. 9—13.

I now proceed to consider a little the character suggested from the other view of the text; namely, that of the careless, indolent, lifeless hearer of the gospel, upon whom all the means of grace are as much lost, as the influence of the heavens are upon a tree that is withered and dried up from the root. What, multitudes of professing christians, if they can be called even so much as professors, does this class likewise include? How many live under a gospel dispensation, are accustomed from day to day to hear the doctrines of it inculcated, its importance expatiated upon, and the danger of neglecting it set forth by every representation that can rouse attention, or convey terror—but all to no purpose; still they care for none of those things, but hold as impertinent intruders, as troublers of their peace, those who love them so much as to endeavour to make them sensible of their folly and danger; saying unto God, "depart from us, for we de-"sire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is "the Almighty, that we should serve him; or what "profit should we have, if we pray unto him?"

It is amazing to observe the vast extent of this class of unprofitable hearers, and the wide difference betwixt the primitive times of christianity and the present, in this respect. There, we see

persons of both sexes, of all ages, professions, and degrees, submitting with the utmost cheerfulness to contempt, reproach, hatred, persecution, tortures, and death, in behalf of that very religion which in our days is received by the generality of men with coolness and indifference. To what can this be owing? not, surely, to any change that has taken place in the thing itself; its truth and importance "are the same yesterday, to-day," and will be so "for ever." The encouragement to it, with us, is greater than ever it was in any age or country; religion is so far from being checked and oppressed by worldly power and authority, that on the contrary these are employed to support and defend, nay, to promote and exalt it. Yet even in such happy circumstances, when it might reasonably be expected that, in the psalmist's language, "the zeal of God's house" should "devour" his professing people, instead of that we meet with nothing but a stupid inattention to, or at most a very lukewarm reception of, those eternal truths which primitive christians maintained with their blood. Under this character are comprehended not only those who are absolutely and professedly indifferent about religion, whose lives are a downright, open contradiction to the gospel, but likewise all those who,

though free from gross and notorious immoralities, go on in a sluggish and inconsiderate course, who sit down contented to be "without God in the "world"—who feel themselves under the reigning power of "the carnal mind, which is enmity "against God," and, consequently, know themselves to be in the "broad way that leadeth to "destruction;" but have learned the unhappy art of saying to themselves, "peace, peace, when "there is no peace;" who under the stupifying influence of this fatal enemy of souls, despise the Saviour, and overlook the means which God has in infinite mercy provided to conduct them to eternal life. While open profanity kills its thousands, indolence and inconsideration may justly be said to kill their ten thousands. There is more hope of the profane and the profligate, than of the slothful and indolent: the former may be, and frequently are, reclaimed; but the case of the others is truly dangerous, if not desperate, as their very situation renders them incapable of attending to what might prove beneficial to them.—The life of a christian is active, laborious, unquiet, is exposed to many hardships and inconveniencies which others are strangers to, and is deprived of many comforts and enjoyments which are agreeable to nature: it is, in a particular man-

ner, inconsistent, absolutely inconsistent with carelessness and indolence, however fond some may be of reconciling them together. The most paltry enjoyments of this world are not to be purchased without diligence, without trouble; and accordingly we find, through all the professions and employments of life, that those who design, who desire to prosper, lay their account with toil and unrest, in the prosecution of their several plans. They "rise up early and go late "to rest, they eat the bread of carefulness;" and is it to be supposed, that the kingdom of heaven is attainable by a few faint endeavours or lazy wishes? No; "the kingdom of heaven suffereth "violence, and the violent take it by force;" it is "they that wait upon the Lord," in the diligent and conscientious exercise of their duty, to whom it is promised that "they shall renew their "strength."—"Strive," says our blessed Lord, "to enter in at the strait gate, for verily I say "unto you, that many shall strive to enter in, "and shall not be able:" and if the righteous hardly are saved, where shall the sinner and the ungodly, the careless and the indolent appear? But it is almost useless to attempt moving persons of this unhappy character by argument. "Like the deaf adder, they have stopped their

"ear against the voice of the charmer;" in them is fulfilled that awful word by the prophet Isaiah, "Hear ye indeed but understand not; and see "ye indeed but perceive not;"—"the heart of "this people is fat, and their ears are heavy, and "their eyes are shut." If it were possible to rouse them for a little, nothing more alarming could be urged than the consideration in the text, the fearful doom denounced against every unprofitable hearer of the everlasting gospel—"Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" a sentence which might strike like a peal of thunder the ears of the greater part of the attenders on public ordinances. Allow me, therefore, as the improvement of what has been said, to call upon you and myself, to beseech you by the tender mercies of God, to be deeply humbled before him, the great sovereign and judge of all the earth, under a just conviction of fruitlessness and unprofitableness, notwithstanding the signal advantages with which we have been favoured: and let us tremble to think, that possibly while we are indulging in schemes of vanity, contriving how we may impose upon the world and upon ourselves, or are stretched upon the bed of sloth, wishing with the sluggard for "a little more "sleep, a little more slumber, a little more fold-

"ing of the hands to sleep,"—the sentence may actually be gone forth against us. We may be given up to "an evil heart of unbelief," to final hardness and impenitence of heart, or our days may be cut off in the midst, while we are still "strangers to God, at enmity with him—stout "hearted, and far from righteousness—cut down "as barren cumberers of the ground: and as the "tree falleth so will it lie for ever; for there is no "work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom "in the grave, whither we are all fast hasting." "Wo unto thee, Chorazin, wo unto thee, Beth-"saida," says our Lord, concerning those sinful cities which were blessed with his personal presence while upon earth, "for if the mighty works had "been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been "done in you, they had a great while ago re-"pented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it "shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at "the judgment than for you."

We, in this happy land of gospel light and liberty of conscience, are no less the distinguished objects of the divine favour and love, than if our Saviour in person taught in our streets. While one part of the christian world is subjected to the tyranny of priestcraft, bigotry, and superstition; kept in the dark about those things which

are of the greatest importance to the eternal happiness of their souls, buried in ignorance, and, O wretched condition, deprived of the means of discovering truth, the scourge of temporal power, tyrannically lording it over the judgment and consciences of men—and others, in the depths of divine wisdom, are visited with a famine of the word, have "the glad tidings of the gospel" administered to them with a sparing hand, who wish and long for one of the "days of the Son of "Man," and cannot obtain it; who would with gladness, with transport, enjoy the blessing of a gospel sabbath, or communion solemnity, but it is far from them—and while a great proportion of the human race is still lost in pagan idolatry, upon whom the glorious light that hath visited us never yet dawned; we enjoy the gospel dispensation in its purity, in its simplicity, and in abundance, in the greatest abundance. If we could suppose the divine favour under the gospel capable of being confined to any one particular nation or people, we are that happy people so highly favoured of the Lord, who have "line upon "line, precept upon precept, here a little and "there a little;" among whom, for a long course of years, the kingdom of the Redeemer has been supported and maintained with that energy, that plainness and power which has often made us

the envy of our neighbours. "Have we not "heard, and have not our fathers told us, nay, "have we not seen with our own eyes, the great "things which God hath wrought for us; how he "hath watered us with the dew of heaven, and "all his paths have dropped fatness upon us?"— But, alas, has our fruitfulness been answerable to this distinguishing goodness—as "God has been "rich in mercy towards us," have we abounded in all the fruits of righteousness towards him? has this grace of God, which has appeared in so remarkable a manner, led us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously and godly in the present world? It is too evident that it has not. And here let every one, instead of looking around him, to observe where he may fix his charge, come home to himself, cast his eyes upon his own heart, and there give the challenge, addressing himself in the words of Nathan to David, "Thou art the man." Thou standest convicted at the bar of a just and holy God. Thou hast offended against much light, and against much love. Thou hast wearied out the patience and long-suffering of a merciful God, and what hast thou to plead why sentence should not speedily be executed against thee? "Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord," be persuaded to awaken to a sense of your duty,

that being no longer " unprofitable hearers of the " word, but doers of the will of God, you may be " blessed in your deed:" and if you would " bring " forth fruit unto God," and to eternal life, close, by a sincere and lively faith, with the Redeemer, as he is freely offered to us in the gospel; for out of him " God is a consuming fire;" out of him, all our fruit, however specious, however outwardly fair, is but like the vine of Sodom, and as the clusters of Gomorrah. There are two stocks into which men are ingrafted; the stock of nature, " the old man, which is corrupt according to the " lusts of the flesh," and the stock Christ, the second Adam, " the new man, which after God " is created in righteousness and true holiness;" and according as we are built upon the one or other of these foundations, will be the fruit we produce. " Do men gather grapes of thorns, or " figs of thistles? Christ is the true vine, and his " father is the husbandman." As we, therefore, have the name of Christ marked upon us, as we profess to be his disciples and followers, let us live as becomes the gospel of Christ. God forbid that any of us should satisfy himself with an empty fruitless profession, with a mere external form of christianity, while our hearts still remain insensible to the life, the spirit, and the power of it: God forbid that we should remain care-

less and indifferent under such an abundance of the means of grace, under such signal advantages as we enjoy above the rest of mankind.—What can be done for us that God has not already done? What expression, what demonstration of the most affectionate regard can be exhibited, that is not contained in the bestowing of his own eternal Son, his unspeakable gift? He has not only given us all the advantages of being and reason—he not only bestows upon us, day by day, all the blessings of providence—he has not only provided a Saviour for us, and with him offered to us all the blessings of his purchase, but has, in the depth of his mercy, extended his patience and long-suffering toward us, while we have continued to despise the means of grace, while we have thrown contempt upon the Saviour. He has again and again returned seeking fruit, and has as often spared, as often delayed the execution of his vengeance upon the careless, formal, lifeless sinner. But let us not presume upon his goodness; the next visit may be to pronounce the awful sentence, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it "the ground?" That this may never be our unhappy case, may God of his infinite mercy grant, for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON XXVI.

LUKE xiii. 6—9.

He spake also this parable: a certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE.

IT is undoubtedly the indispensible duty of all who profess to preach the gospel, to declare the whole counsel of God, without concealing or disguising any part of it: to "say unto the righteous, that it shall be well with them, for they shall "eat the fruit of their doings, and unto the wicked, it shall be ill with them; for the reward of "their hands shall be given them;" and in this manner, as "faithful stewards over the household of God, to distribute unto every one his

"portion of meat in due season." It were most sincerely to be wished, that the hearts and lives of men were such as to render reflections upon human nature in general, and severe censures and reproofs of particular persons, altogether unnecessary—that the human soul were so vigorous and healthy as to stand in no need of the physician's aid. But dangerous, desperate diseases necessarily require strong, and sometimes disagreeable, medicines; and that is very ill-judged lenity which leads the physician to consult rather the taste than the safety of his patient. The parable I have now read speaks nothing but terror to the great bulk of mankind; for, alas! how small a proportion even of professing christians do really bring forth fruit unto God: some contenting themselves with an empty lifeless profession; others with the bare name of christians; a great many openly disavowing all regard for religion, by living in direct contradiction to its precepts, committing every sort of iniquity with greediness, "declaring their sin like Sodom, and hiding it "not;" and all, too little concerned to keep alive the genuine spirit and power of Christianity.

Some in this congregation will probably remember, that in discoursing formerly on this subject, in explication of the parable, we observed,

that by the owner of the vineyard was to be understood God himself, the great author and proprietor of the world, and all things therein; by the gardener, or dresser of the vineyard, is meant Jesus Christ, our gracious mediator and intercessor with the Father; and by the barren fig-tree, every hypocritical, careless, or wicked member of Christ's visible church. In the text we observed the following particulars: 1st. Man's degeneracy and worthlessness, represented by a barren tree cumbering the ground. 2. The goodness and forbearance of God toward sinners, in delaying the execution of his justice upon them, held forth under the notion of the owner of a vineyard's visiting year by year in expectation of fruit, a tree which persists in barrenness, and still suspending the destruction of it. 3. We see the justice and severity of God against the impenitent, in his at length coming to the awful resolution of utterly destroying the obstinately fruitless and unprofitable. And 4. The gracious intercession of our blessed Redeemer is figured by the gardener interceding with the owner in behalf of a favourite tree, of which, though hitherto unfruitful, he would fain, by proper culture, entertain good hopes. The first of these particulars we at that time fully considered; namely, our degeneracy and worthlessness, which we observed, in ge-

neral, arose from that universal corruption and depravity of our nature, which was the consequence of our fatal apostacy from God, whereby we became exposed to his wrath, and are wholly incapacitated to do what is acceptable in his sight, or in any respect to contribute to our own happiness: more particularly from the text we observed, that two characters seemed to be principally designed; by viewing a barren tree under two different aspects: 1st. As promising a crop, by exhibiting the previous signs of fruitfulness, emitting buds, leaves, and blossoms, which represents the character of the hypocrite, who "comes "before God as his people cometh," occupies a place in the religious assembly of christians, puts on every form and appearance of religion, while he is at heart an utter stranger to the life and power of it.—And 2d. If we consider a barren tree, as one wholly dried up and withered, without so much as the appearance of fruit, upon which the influence of the elements makes no sort of impression; then the character designed is that of the careless, indolent, lifeless hearers of the gospel, who, under all the means of grace, remain hard and impenitent, indifferent and unconcerned: against such is the dreadful sentence in the text denounced. Having thus, for the sake of assisting your memories, and in order that we

may see the subject at one view, briefly recapitulated what was formerly delivered, I now proceed to the second particular, namely, the goodness and forbearance of God toward sinners, in delaying the execution of his justice upon them: and this is illustrated in the

First place, in that patience which God exercises toward sinners, in the ordinary administration of human affairs. Justice, strict justice requires, that, upon the offence being committed, the offender should without delay be consigned over to punishment. And accordingly we find, that in order to vindicate the honour and majesty of God, infinite justice is concerned sometimes to punish daring acts of impiety immediately upon their commission, for the sake of public example, to set up now and then a monument of wrath for a terror to others; as in that flagrant and bold instance of defiance to almighty power committed by a company of rebellious Israelites, [illegible] on of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, recorded in the book of Numbers, which was immediately punished by the earth's opening its [illegible] and swallowing them up alive—and that other attack upon the divine Majesty, of which the sons of Aaron were guilty, in presenting God with an unhallowed offering with strange fire,

which was likewise instantaneously punished by a consuming fire from the Lord, which devoured them, as it is related in the tenth chapter of Leviticus, from the beginning. These, with some others, stand upon record, as beacons to mankind to beware of like presumptuous acts of vice; but in general, the lenity of the divine government is such, that we frequently find the highest acts of mercy and goodness returned for the most daring provocations, and the most undaunted contempt of omnipotence: God pities, and allures by the tender bonds of mercy and love, even the wretch who dares openly and avowedly to trample upon his authority; yea, who has the hardiness, the insolence, to insult his sacred person and character. The profane swearer daily blasphemes the great and terrible name of God, and yet is not cut off with his oaths and execrations upon his tongue: he madly calls down eternal vengeance upon his own head, and yet God, instead of blasting with instant destruction, continues to offer him eternal life and happiness;—neither does he send the liar quick to hell, with his lie in his right hand, but still waiteth to be gracious, still addresses sinners of every denomination, "Return unto me, and be ye saved, "Israel: thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is "thy help. Come now, and let us reason together;

" though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be " made as white as snow; though they be red like " crimson, they shall be as wool:" which is a

Second illustration to this purpose; namely, the express declaration which he, who cannot lie, so often condescends to make to us in scripture: when the Almighty would give us a description of himself, the great characters of good, merciful, and long suffering, shine forth with peculiar lustre; we find Moses, in the book of Exodus, frequently preferring this petition, "Lord, " shew me thy glory;" and what is the answer to this, wherein does God himself make his chief glory to consist? why, in being " the Lord, the " Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffer- " ing, and abundant in goodness and truth, keep- " ing mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, " transgression, and sin. I am he that blotteth " out thy transgressions, and will remember thy " sins no more; let the wicked man forsake his " way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, " and let him return unto the Lord, and he will " have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he " will abundantly pardon:" and lest guilty sinners, from a consciousness of their repeated provocations against him, should be tempted to call in question the goodness of God, he is graci-

ously pleased to confirm it even with an oath: "Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, "but that the wicked turn from his way and "live." Hence, likewise, are those expressions of grief and reluctance to punish, when the sins of individuals, or of communities, have rendered judgments, general or particular, absolutely necessary: "How shall I give thee up?" does the Almighty exclaim in the most affectionate manner over his ancient people, whose sins were grown to such a pitch as to equal, if not exceed, those of the sinful cities which God overthrew with fire and brimstone out of heaven—"how "shall I give thee up, how shall I make thee, "whom I have loved and favoured so much, an "eternal monument of my displeasure? Mine "heart is turned within me, my repentings are "kindled together; I will not execute the fierce-"ness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy "thee, for I am God, and not man, the Holy "One in the midst of thee." But the strongest proof of this goodness and long-suffering is in the

Third place, that wonderful patience which God exercises toward sinners who reject the calls of the gospel. God has, in Christ Jesus, expressed the highest instance of goodness toward us, which

even infinite goodness can discover; when by sin, we had ruined ourselves, rendered ourselves obnoxious to eternal wrath, and were wholly unable to make restitution and atonement, or to avert the curse, "God pitied us in our low and "lost estate, and laid our help upon one mighty "to save;" gave "his only begotten and well be-"loved Son to the death for our sakes, that we "might not perish, but have everlasting life;" and was it not reasonable to expect, that such a dispensation of mercy would have been embraced with eagerness, with rapture, by the wretched posterity of Adam, with as much joy as a pardon is received by a criminal under sentence of death, at the place of execution? What then remained upon the rejection of this scheme of salvation by a mediator, but the instant execution of the penalty of the broken law? "These mine enemies "that would not that I should reign over them, "bring them out and slay them before me;" what had the guilty criminal to expect, "but a "certain fearful looking for of judgment, and "fiery indignation to destroy God's adversaries?" But blessed be God, that "his ways are not our "ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts"—that "he is God and not man." He is unwilling to take any denial, but "stretches out his hands all "day long to a disobedient and gainsaying peo-

" ple," nay, day by day renews his offers—" Un-
" to you, O man, I call, and my voice is to the sons
" of men—how long will you be blind to your
" own most important, your eternal interests?
" how long will you embrace your own destruc-
" tion? wherefore will you spend your money
" for that which is not bread, and your labour
" for that which satisfieth not? O foolish crea-
" tures and unwise! shall I call so often with
" mercy, pardon, and happiness in my hand, and
" call in vain—are you then obstinately resolved
" to perish, are you in love with your own ruin?
" O yet, bethink yourselves ere it be too late, be
" entreated by the bowels of mercy, to have pity
" upon your own souls; behold, I am ready to re-
" ceive you as my dear children; I will heal your
" backslidings, I will love you freely, and my
" anger shall be turned away from you." Such, my friends, is the tender and affectionate language in which our offended God this day addresses his rebellious creatures, and though repeatedly refused, and repulsed, " he still waiteth " to be gracious." To conclude this head, have we not all an experimental proof of the goodness and forbearance of God, every one in his own particular case, were God as ready to punish as we are to offend, what must have been our situation long before this time? " It is of the

" Lord's mercy that we are not consumed;" it is because " his compassion faileth not," that we are alive before him as at this day—he has invited us sometimes by mercies, sometimes by judgments, he now invites us by the terrors of the law, and by the allurements of the gospel; he has visited us year by year, not for three or four, but some of us for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, in expectation of fruit; and though in too many cases he has found none, yet all that time he has spared, pitied, and admitted to further trial. This is our situation at present, and many of us, God knows, may be in the last stage of our probation; the next visit may be of a very different nature: and does it not then highly concern each of us for himself, to put the question which the trembling disciples did upon another occasion, " Lord, " is it I: Lord, is it I?" O God, of thy infinite mercy forbid; let the language of our hearts be, " through thy grace, we will henceforth devote " ourselves to thee, we will this very instant em- " brace the Saviour, and through his strength be " stedfast and immovable, always abounding " in the work of the Lord." I now proceed to the

third particular; namely, the justice and severity of God against the impenitent, in his com-

ing at length to the awful resolution of utterly destroying the obstinately fruitless and unprofitable fig-tree: "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the "ground?" And here, inclination would willingly lead me to stop short—here charity would fain suppose that no such unhappy object of the divine displeasure frequented a christian assembly: but as such a supposition, alas, is too great for the most extensive charity to make, as it is too much to be feared that numbers are in this dreadful condition, or though there were but one now hearing me, for the sake of that unhappy one, we are obliged, since the offers of mercy are ineffectual, to denounce the terrors of the Lord, and to say unto such a person, "Wo, wo unto "thee, there is no peace nor rest for thee, for the "almighty God is thine adversary—eternal jus- "tice, offended patience, and loving-kindness are "up in arms against thee—all the glorious attri- "butes and perfections of the Supreme Being are "concerned to make thee for ever miserable; and "surely it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands "of the living God." God executes this awful sentence in two ways: 1st. When he gives up obstinate sinners to final hardness and impenitence of heart, ceasing to be a reprover unto them, leaving them to the dominion of a blinded, reprobate mind, according to that threatening by the pro-

phet Isaiah, "Go and tell this people, hear ye "indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, "but perceive not: make the heart of this people "fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their "eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear "with their ears, and understand with their "hearts, and convert and be healed." And what is this, but to be bound over to endless punishment? what is it but to have hell kindled up in the soul before the time, to be finally excluded from God's favour, and from the light of his countenance? what is it, but to have everything conspiring, working together to increase the misery of the devoted victim? 2nd. God puts in execution this sentence, when he actually cuts off the sinner in the middle of his career, and stops his course of sin and life together. And what must be the dreadful consequence of being hurried from a life of unrepented guilt? An eternity of unalterable woe. What, and how great are the torments inflicted upon the wicked in a state of retribution? It is impossible for us in our present circumstances to conceive, much less to describe. The scripture holds out that state of woe under every representation that can inspire horror—"the second death—the lake that burn-"eth with fire and brimstone for ever—the bot-"tomless pit—the worm that dieth not, and the

"fire that is not quenched," all expressive of the highest extremes of misery and pain; and no doubt the punishment which enraged Omnipotence will inflict must be inexpressibly dreadful. How awful the portion that awaits the concealed hypocrite, the carnally secure and the openly profane sinner! Let us tremble to think, then, that while we are practising our schemes of deceit, contriving how we may impose upon the world, or, what is worse, upon our own souls, or stretching ourselves upon the bed of sloth, calling for "a "little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little "more folding of the hands to sleep;" we may be hurried from our vain dreams, to a state where there is no deceit, no imposition, no respite; where all our secret guilt must be declared, nor the minutest circumstance concealed. But I gladly leave so gloomy a scene—humbly praying the Father of Mercies, that there may be none here who has any concern in it, in the pleasing hope, that all our souls are "bound up with God "in the bundle of life;" and ever blessed be his name, that I can now turn to a more delightful theme, contained in the

Fourth and last particular; namely, the [illegible] clearing view we have of the gracious intercession of our blessed Redeemer in these words, "Lord,

" let it alone for this year also."—" Rejoice there-
" fore, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth, and
" break forth into singing, O mountains: we have
" an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the
" righteous, in whom God is ever well pleased,"
for whose sake alone it is, that we are this day
the objects of mercy. This is he who " is come
" in the name of the Lord to save us;" who was
sent " to preach liberty to the captives, and the
" opening of the prison to them that are bound;"
this is he " in whom we have redemption through
" his blood, even the forgiveness of sins according
" to the riches of his grace." Our blessed Lord
has already fulfilled one part of his priestly office
by becoming an expiation and atonement for
our sins, having in his life " magnified the law,
" and made it honourable" by perfectly fulfilling
it in our stead, and by his death has fully satis-
fied the demands of justice, and turned away
the curse from us, which by our sins we had in-
curred, and thus has " finished transgression,
" made an end of sin, and brought in an everlast-
" ing righteousness." But one part of his media-
torial office is still unfinished, namely, that of an
intercession, which, therefore, is continuing to be
[illegible] will only be accomplished when he
shall " have gathered into one all his people,
" from all nations, kindreds, tongues, and lan-

" guages," when he shall have collected his triumphant church, and raised it to his heavenly kingdom and glory, to live and reign with him for ever: Nor even then shall this endearing relation between him and his people cease, for " he is exalted at the right hand of God to make " continual intercession for us;" and this shall be the song and theme of his people to all the blissful ages of eternity; " unto him that loved us, " and washed us from our sins in his own blood, " and has made us kings and priests unto God, " even the Father, be glory and praise for ever and " ever." My very dear friends, this Saviour with all the blessings of his purchase, is this day offered unto you—now, even now he " stands at the " door and knocks, and if any man will open the " door," and receive him, there he will set up his rest, and make his abode for ever: now he offers himself and eternal life to your acceptance, beseeches you, by the tender mercies of God, and as you love your own souls, to be reconciled unto God, to " fly from the wrath to come." Let your past sins be what they will, however many, however great, and however long your continuance in them, here is a free and full pardon in your offer—even now Christ " maketh intercession for you," intercedeth for the lengthening out of your merciful visitation. If then you are but

willing to be happy, the united power of men and devils shall be altogether insufficient to make you miserable; for, saith Christ, "I give unto them "eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither "shall any pluck them out of my hand; for my "Father, which gave them me, is greater than "all, and none is able to pluck them out of my "Father's hand." Put ye on, therefore, the Lord Jesus; receive him into your hearts by faith, but let him be received whole and entire—as your sanctification as well as justification, as your prophet to teach and instruct, and your king to rule and govern you, as well as your atonement and intercessor. There is not a wicked man upon earth who would not wish to partake of the benefits of Christ's death; there is none but would wish to be saved from hell; but they cannot think of being made meet for heaven, of following the example of Christ. All without exception would gladly "die the death of the righteous," however few incline to live their [illegible]. Christ, therefore, must be received as all in all—as including every thing a sinner possibly can want, and excluding all hope and help from any other quarter. Let our endeavour then to be suitably impressed with a sense of our misery by nature, of our deep guilt by reason of sin, of our worthlessness and inability to help ourselves, and of the

mercy of God through a mediator, and let us humbly implore the Father of mercies, that "the "eyes of our understanding being enlightened," we may see the suitableness of the Saviour to our condition in every respect; that we may view him not only as the Saviour of a lost world, but as our Saviour and Redeemer, as containing all things necessary for our particular situation, a full supply for all our wants, a remedy for all our diseases, an atonement for all our guilt; that our hearts may be opened to receive Christ, to embrace the terms of grace and salvation through his blood; and let this be done without hesitation, and without reserve; let the language of our hearts be, "my Lord, and my God, I take thee for my all in time, and for eternity;" and let us embrace the Saviour with a glow, a warmth of affection; let us, by faith, eye him as "the chief "among ten thousand, and altogether lovely," as worthy, infinitely worthy of all our gratitude, esteem, and veneration, and that, both on account of what he is in himself possessed of all possible glory and excellency, but in a more endearing manner on account of what he has been and is to us, our intercessor and peace maker with God, our deliverer from hell and wrath, our way and guide, our right and title to eternal glory and happiness—"This is that faith which

" purifieth the heart, which overcometh the world, " and which worketh by love;" which will necessarily be productive of all " the fruits of righteous- " ness, that by Jesus Christ are to the praise and " glory of God"—that faith which opens our way to the favour of God, whereby Christ and the benefits of redemption are made over and appropriated to us. And now to conclude; if we thus bring forth fruit, all shall be well—our eternal happiness is built upon an immoveable foundation, against which " the gates of hell shall never " prevail, and all things whatsoever shall work " together for good to us,"—if this is our happy state, we shall enjoy the ordinary bounties of providence, with that filial love and gratitude, which gives a relish to every enjoyment—in the delightful confidence that our present happiness is the gift of our heavenly Father, as an earnest of his love, and a pledge of much greater and better spiritual blessings in a future world; with what inexpressible joy shall we then observe all the dispensations of infinite wisdom, calculated to promote and increase our satisfaction, the Almighty himself, as interested with all his glorious attributes and perfections, " to bless us, and do " us good" and even the calamities and afflictions which we may suffer, will then lose their sting, will no longer be regarded as the wounds

of an enemy; but as the necessary chastisement of a kind and tender-hearted father; and we shall have the ineffable satisfaction to think, that the present "light afflictions, which are but for a mo- "ment, shall work for us a far more exceeding "and eternal weight of glory;"—then shall our "light so shine before men, that others seeing "our good works, may glorify our Father who "is in heaven." Thus shall we live happy in ourselves, and a blessing to all around us; thus shall we prove ourselves to be indeed the disciples and followers of Jesus; thus shall we "fi- "nish our course here with joy," and then be transplanted into the paradise of God, where we shall flourish and bring forth fruit, and be happy to all the ages of eternity, which may God of his infinite mercy grant for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON XXVII.

MATTHEW vi. 33.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

ON SEEKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

THE good things of a present life are the pursuit of by far the greatest part of mankind, who pay little if any regard at all to a future state of existence. "Who will shew us any "good?" is the universal demand, while the only certain means of acquiring and securing happiness are stupidly and shamefully neglected. Though the concurring experience of mankind sufficiently assures us that the possession of what are called the gifts of fortune by no means insure happiness to their possessors, though the word of God, confirmed by the experience of not a few, gives us equal assurance on the other hand, that true, solid, and lasting happiness, both in this and a future state, arises entirely from the favour

and love of God, independent of what this world can give or take away; yet such is the fatal thoughtlessness, and folly of men, that all their views are directed to those things which never can yield satisfaction, while they neglect and overlook the "one thing needful," which is alone worthy the regard of an immortal soul. That we may not mistake the road, therefore, in our researches after happiness, we must begin at the right end; we must begin with securing our most important, our eternal concerns; by "seeking the kingdom of God and his righteous-"ness" in the first place, leaving the rest to the goodness and loving kindness of our heavenly Father, and trusting to the gracious assurance our Saviour here gives us, that if we do so, the good things of a present world, so far as shall be for our real advantage, will follow of course, will, as the word literally signifies, be added as an overplus to a bargain. In discoursing from this subject, I propose through the divine assistance, in the

First place, to shew what it is to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness; 2dly, to point out the grounds of assurance we have, that if we comply with this precept of our Saviour, a competent portion of the good things of

this life shall be made sure to us; and 3dly, to inforce the duty with some motives and arguments.—I am

First, To shew what it is to "seek the kingdom "of God and his righteousness."—"The kingdom "of God" is taken in various acceptations in the New Testament; sometimes it stands to signify the gospel dispensation on account of its tendency, namely, to bring men from under the slavery and dominion of sin and Satan, and to raise them to the dignity of free subjects to God; on account of the imperial, the dignified manner of its promulgation to the world, by Jesus Christ himself, who is "king of kings, and "lord of lords;" on account of its final end and design, namely, to put mankind in possession of that "kingdom prepared for the children of God, "from the foundation of the world," and which is "eternal in the heavens." The kingdom of God sometimes signifies the gifts and operations of the Spirit of God upon the souls of men; thus the Apostle to the Romans: "The kingdom of "God is not meats and drinks, but righteousness, "and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost." And, last of all, the kingdom of God, in its most usual acceptation, signifies that heavenly, that enduring kingdom, that "incorruptible and un-

"defiled inheritance," which the ransomed of the Lord shall be made to possess beyond death and the grave; that kingdom over which "God and "the Lamb shall reign for ever and ever," all the subjects of which shall be crowned with immortal glory and honour, and be themselves "kings "and priests unto God even the Father." In this last sense it must be used here, on account of the manifest opposition in which it stands to the preceding context. "Take no thought," says our Lord, "saying, what shall we eat, or "what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we "be clothed;" that is, be not anxiously concerned in making provision for this frail life, this transitory state of existence, wherein there is nothing certain, nothing real, which is filled with crosses and disappointments, and which you must soon resign, though possessed of all the happiness it is capable of bestowing: but as you are creatures formed for eternity, indued with immortal spirits, whereby you have an interest in future ages, let your chief care be, to provide for that state of being, to secure your place and portion in "that kingdom which cannot be moved." To "seek the kingdom of God," then, implies in the first place, a high esteem of it, for its transcendant worth and excellency.—It is impossible for us, in our present state of imperfection, to

form any just notions of the glory and happiness of the heavenly state; when we attempt to meditate on this subject, our thoughts are involved as it were in a thick mist; the idea is infinitely too great for mortal comprehension; the word of God indeed comes in to our assistance, and gives us to see it, as it were "through a glass darkly," holding it out to us under such images as are most calculated to engage our attention, under the representation of such things as are in the highest estimation amongst men; it is called "a "crown, a crown of righteousness, a crown of "glory; an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, "and that fadeth not away; an habitation of "God, a house made without hands, which is eter- "nal in the heavens:" but these representations are so infinitely below the reality, that an inspired prophet, though his language seems to resemble that of angels, and after him an inspired apostle, though actually "rapt up into the third heaven," received into paradise, and admitted to the converse of the blessed inhabitants there, yet when they would give us a description of it, words fail, and thought is lost; all they are able to say is, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath "entered into the heart of man, the things which "God hath prepared for them that love him:" we may srettch our imagination, then, to the

highest pitch, and give a full loose to our wishes, without running the smallest risk of disappointment. To seek the kingdom of God implies, in the second place, a preference of choice bestowed upon it, above every thing else. Unless we are convinced of the worth and importance of any object, we shall not be very earnest in our endeavours to obtain it, and this is the reason that the bulk of mankind are so indifferent about the great objects which religion offers to their consideration; they are not convinced of their superior value, and why? "the God of this world "has blinded their minds," has removed futurity to such a vast distance, that its impression comes with small force upon the mind, and dresses up present and sensual enjoyments in colours so attracting, that these, together with the unhappy bias of our nature, powerfully incline us to the wrong side. There is not, indeed, it may be justly affirmed, a more difficult task, than for creatures of our frame and constitution, creatures in whom the corporeal part bears so very considerable a proportion, to treat future objects as if they were present, and present objects as if they were future, and yet this we must do, if we would make a true estimate of things. When we allow ourselves to think, reason indeed will

soon tell us, that surely a period so short as threescore years and ten, though passed in all the pleasures time can afford, in health, in affluence, in grandeur, in power, that is taking man at his best estate, is not once to be compared with an eternity passed in the enjoyment of God, in the contemplation of his nature and perfections, in admiration of the wonders of providence, and in the most delightful researches into "the height and depth, "the length and breadth," of redeeming love; "that love of God which passeth understanding." But how does the very shadow of comparison vanish, when we consider man as he really is, a creature of yesterday, uncertain of seeing to-morrow, and that the present hour is filled up with pain, and sorrow, and disappointment; when we consider this state as "an handbreadth," or a "span," as already passed away, and eternity as already come, which is in truth the case. It is only by frequently and seriously indulging reflections of this kind, that we shall learn to acquire that indifference for this world, and that value for the future, which is so necessary toward our giving the preference where it is due. But the conduct of mankind is so widely different, that were a being of a superior nature, who was unacquainted with our system, to come into the world,

and observe what passes in it, he would certainly be completely at a loss what notion to form of human nature. He would doubtless think, that man was made just to frolic about for a small space, and then to "lie down to be no more." But should he be informed that man was made for immortality, and that his happiness or misery through the ages of eternity depended entirely upon the manner in which he passed the small portion of time allotted to him in this state, he must imagine the whole of human life an absurdity, a contradiction. But in the third place, "seeking the kingdom of God," implies seeking to be prepared for it; and this is indeed the main scope of our Saviour's precept: "Seek ye first the "kingdom of God and his righteousness," that is, "seek after that holiness which alone pre-"pares for the inheritance of the saints in light, "for he that hath this hope in him, purifieth him-"self, even as he is pure." The all-wise author of our nature designed man for the enjoyment of himself, and for this end created him in all the dignity of wisdom and innocence, a holy, a perfect creature, "writ his law upon his heart" as his rule, erected reason in his breast as his guide, and set up conscience as his overseer and judge: but this happy establishment was but of short continuance; soon did man, who was created so "up-

"right," find out "many inventions," soon did he transgress his rule, forsake his guide, and bid defiance to his judge, and thereby he utterly disqualified himself for that exalted intercourse with his Maker which he formerly enjoyed, effaced the image of the Deity which was lately his glory and happiness, and forfeited all right to those blessings and privileges which, as a creature and a child of God, he was intitled to. Out of this deplorable condition it was absolutely impossible for him to extricate himself, for man was now become a weak, as well as a guilty creature; sin had wasted the strength, as well as marred the beauty of the human soul: and in this condition are we all born into the world, at enmity with God, at a distance from him, unable to return to him, and as unwilling as unable. Yet still, blessed be God, that even in such a situation we are the objects of his pity and love: he has given his own eternal Son for our sakes, who in his life has taught us the path that leadeth to eternal life and happiness, and by his death paid the price of it. In order therefore to acquire the righteousness requisite for the enjoyment of the heavenly state, we must propose to ourselves this Saviour for our surety and pattern—resting all our hopes of justification in the sight of God on what he has done and suffered; conscious of our

own weakness and imperfection, and placing no confidence in ourselves as able to merit any thing at the hand of a Being infinitely holy and just, we must humbly implore the Father of Mercies, that "Christ may of God be made to us wisdom, "and righteousness, and sanctification, and re- "demption." At the same time, we must make his example the pattern of our conduct, and let it be our constant and sincere endeavour to "walk "even as he also walked;" to transcribe into our lives those graces and virtues which shone in full splendour in him. The intention of our Lord's entering into the world, and becoming our mediator with God, was not only to save from wrath, but likewise from sin; for this purpose he lived, to give mankind a perfect pattern of all righteousness, of an exact conformity to the law of God, which is holy, and just, and good, as well as died a sacrifice for the sins of a guilty world, to atone for the breach of that law; and these two are never to be separated, as if we were concerned in the one more than in the other; for that man cannot reasonably expect to reap any benefit by the sufferings of Christ, who does not likewise lay his account with, and endeavour after living as he also lived. If therefore, we would seek after that heavenly kingdom in a proper manner, the way is plain and obvious. As "without ho-

"liness it is impossible to see God," and as "all "our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags in his "sight," in the Redeemer alone must we look for righteousness and strength; "laying aside "every weight and the sin that doth so easily "beset us, we must run with patience the race "set before us, looking unto Jesus the author "and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that "was set before him, endured the cross, despis-"ing the shame, and is now set down on the right "hand of the Majesty on high." I proceed to the

Second head, which is, to point out the grounds of assurance we have, that if we comply with this precept of our Saviour, a competent portion of the good things of this life shall be made sure to us—they are the strongest that can be imagined; we have, in the first place, the unerring wisdom of God himself to depend upon, that wisdom which sets past, present, and future, in one point of view, and which necessarily must dispose and direct every thing in the best manner. He knows our attachment to this world and the things thereof, and the dangerous consequences this must be attended with to our most interesting concerns, and therefore, in pity to our souls, withholds earthly enjoyments, "takes away the

" desire of the heart and of the eyes," to shew us the folly of placing our chief happiness, or setting up our rest in this world: he knows what is good for us, infinitely better than we ourselves know: when, therefore, we meet with crosses and disappointments, as we frequently must, the proper way of improving them would be to reason with ourselves in this manner: " I do indeed " wish such and such a gratification, but infinite " wisdom judges it to be more for my good that " I should want it; and who knows but it might " prove fatal to me if I were indulged in it; might " it not steal my heart from God, and make me " lose sight of my heavenly inheritance?—I have " met with such a loss, or such a trial, but, blessed " be God, I have still a great deal to be thank- " ful for, I have still a great deal left behind: or " though I have but little here, why should I re- " pine, who have 'treasures in heaven, where " neither moth nor rust can corrupt, nor thieves " break through to steal,' and shall I dare to call " in question the wisdom of the divine admini- " stration, which has so richly provided for me?" In reality we see, that happiness does not consist in " the abundance of the things which a man " possesseth." Does not every day's experience point out to us instances of splendid misery; the wealthy, dissatisfied, disturbed, and perplexed in

the midst of their riches; the voluptuous, sick and languid though swimming in a sea of sensual pleasures; and the great, distracted and harassed with the noise and bustle of their station, groaning beneath the burden of state? while the poor mean man, who with the sweat of his brow earns from day to day a scanty and coarse subsistence, unnoticing the great world and unnoticed by it, can enjoy a happiness which pomp seldom knows, proceeding from the approbation of a good conscience, a sense of the favour of his Maker, and of the light of his countenance, with the well grounded hope of a blessed immortality. What have we to fear then, so long as we are permitted to trust in something infinitely superior to our own prudence and sagacity, which may often fail us, seeing we have unerring wisdom to provide for us? The second ground of assurance I shall mention is, the almighty power of God. He is not only all-wise to provide, but likewise all-powerful to bestow. People generally reckon themselves very secure, when they are under the protection of a great and powerful friend, who is able to promote their interest, who has the bestowing of some profitable place or office; but how circumscribed is all human power compared with his, whom heaven and earth obey, to whom all nature is subservient, who has the

absolute disposal of every event, and can make every dispensation bring forth good to those that love him? Is not that man secure then, who has the almighty God for his refuge—who can safely repose an unbounded confidence in him who by his powerful word first spoke this universe into existence; and "in whom all things live, "move, and have their being;"—who "maketh "his sun to rise, his rain to descend," the seasons to revolve, and the earth to bring forth abundantly all things needful and agreeable? And then, this almighty Being is not like the great ones of the earth, difficult of access, and hard of intreaty; no, he is at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, ready to hear the voice of his supplicants: which leads me to a third ground of assurance to this purpose; namely, the unbounded goodness of God. Little would it avail us, that his omniscience could provide what was conducive to our happiness, or that his omnipotence was able to give it, were we not assured at the same time of his love to us, of his willingness to bestow his favours. When we consider our own deserving, indeed, little reason have we to expect good at his hand; but though with men this may be a way of reckoning, yet with God it is otherwise, it is the very nature of his goodness to be extended to "the evil and the unthankful,"

to triumph over the unworthiness of its objects; it is likewise very different from what we observe among men in this respect, that with them, the greatness of a favour we wish to obtain imposes silence on us, lest our benefactor should think us guilty of presumption; or the sense of former obligations and benefits makes us ashamed to ask more. But it is not so with our heavenly benefactor: let the desires of our hearts be enlarged to the utmost, still they must fall infinitely short of what his boundless goodness is ever ready to grant, and the having formerly received favours at his hand is so far from being an argument against the continuation of them, that, on the contrary, God allows us to presume on what he has already done for us, as a title to further measures of goodness. True indeed, he has not here promised us the superfluity, or even the abundance, of worldly enjoyments, but he has promised what is infinitely greater and better, his favour and love; and what can that man want, who is possessed of so rich an inheritance? But even this were not sufficient, if we had not a further ground of confidence, namely, the unalterable never-failing faithfulness of God: this, this is the security of all the rest, for "whom God loves, he "loves to the end. The mountains shall depart, "and the hills be removed, but my loving-kind-

"ness shall not depart, neither shall the covenant "of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that "hath mercy upon thee: with the Father of "lights there is no variableness nor shadow of "turning;" but "he is the same yesterday, to-"day, and for ever;" no degree of unworthiness in us can ever alter the current of his lovingkindness toward us. "If this God then be for us, who "can be against us?" if we have an interest secured in his love, what can disturb us? With such a portion in reserve, even poverty is treasure inestimable, this world with all its distresses a paradise, and even misery itself puts on a smiling form. But besides all this, religion is in its own nature calculated to promote our happiness even in this world: does it not teach us to subdue our corrupt appetites and passions, which are the source of all our misery? for, when once our irregular desires are reduced within proper bounds, a very little we see is sufficient: a mind contented and at peace with itself, can enjoy the truest happiness in all circumstances; and a conscious freedom from guilt is more than a counterbalance to all the ills of life: honesty and uprightness in our dealings with mankind are the surest means of thriving in the world—a principle of universal benevolence the best way to conciliate friends—and a harmless and inoffensive conduct the most

certain method to avoid enemies. So that "godliness is in every respect great gain, having the "promise both of the life that now is, and of that "which is to come," and having in its own nature a tendency to insure present, as well as future happiness. I proceed in the

3d. Place, to enforce the duty with some motives and arguments.—The first I shall mention is, that it is the command and advice of our Saviour; which must, if we are what we profess, his disciples and servants, be of considerable weight with us. His will should to us ever be held sacred, for are we not bound by every tie of duty and gratitude to submit to his precepts, be they ever so severe, even to the "cutting off a right hand, "or plucking out a right eye?" how much more, when all he requires of us is to study our own good; God has graciously been pleased to connect our duty and our interest together in the strictest manner, so that while we serve him, we at the same time promote our own well-being. What a noble encouragement to the practice of our duty, that "in the keeping of God's command-"ments" there is the richest reward included; a reward which comprehends all the blessings and comforts of time and of eternity. The second motive I mention is, the great danger of

neglecting this precept. It is by no means a matter of indifference whether we observe it or not, for negligence here is attended with the most awful consequences; if we are not at pains to "seek after the kingdom of God and his righte-"ousness," we of course secure to ourselves a portion of unutterable woe; we expose ourselves to "the stings of the worm that dieth not," and the torments of "the fire that is not quenched." And with such a fearful prospect, what enjoyment is to be found in all the abundance of earthly good things? There is not a more alarming word in the whole book of God, than that by the prophet Malachi: "I will even curse your bles-"sings; yea, I have cursed them already." Can there be a more terrible consideration than this, that the very bounties of Providence shall be converted into curses, and serve to heighten our condemnation? How wretched, how miserable must that man be, who has no provision made for eternity, and who is every moment haunted with the dreadful reflection of an ill spent life, and the gloomy prospect of the very next moment having his possessions torn from him, or he from them; and of being hurried from this world to the tribunal of his offended Judge, to receive the doom of that "wicked and unprofitable servant,"

who did not make the proper use of the "talent" committed to him, "take and cast him into utter "darkness, where there shall be weeping, and "wailing, and gnashing of teeth!" But what shall be said of those, to whom God has been pleased to allot a double portion of the miseries of this life, in order to wean them from this world, and make them "set their affections on things "above," and yet still they cleave to their sins, and intail upon themselves tenfold misery in a future world? for we see by sad experience that "the fruit of affliction" is far from being always "the purging away of sin;" but on the contrary, affliction frequently produces an opposite effect: their conduct is just like that of a man who, labouring under a dangerous disease, instead of taking the healing medicine prescribed by his physician, should swallow a dose of poison, and destroy himself outright. The third and last motive I shall make mention of, is the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of the time thereof. This state of existence must sooner or later come to a period, as well by the course of nature as by the supreme positive will of God; the duration of it at the longest is but a few years, and of these we have not security for a single hour; neither health, nor youth, nor riches, nor power, can stop

the arrest of death for one moment: on this side the grave all is fluctuating and uncertain, beyond, all is fixed and certain. It is impossible for us indeed to divest ourselves of the most eager affection to this life with all its disadvantages; religion does not require such a sacrifice at our hands, but rather seems to permit this weakness of our nature, by promising us indulgence therein, as an inducement to engage us to the study of what we are more deeply concerned in; if we would therefore wish to enjoy life, and to be fortified to resist the attacks of the king of terrors, let us " first seek the kingdom of God and his " righteousness," that so we may " in patience " possess our souls," and then death will never overtake us at a disadvantage, or find us unprepared; then will that awful monster put on a different appearance; it will no longer approach us as a serpent armed with a mortal sting; but as a welcome messenger to recal us from a tedious banishment, home to our father's kingdom, to put a final end to all our troubles and wants, and to place us in possession of all the treasures of eternity.—Let " our affections then be set on " things above, not on the things which are be- " low;" let us in an humble dependance on the aid of divine grace, advance in " holiness, without

" which no man can see God;" that at the final consummation of all things, our ears may hear the delightful sentence of approbation,—" Come, " ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom " prepared for you from the foundation of the " world." Amen.

SERMON XXVIII.

JOHN xiv. 15.

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

ON LOVE TO CHRIST.

IT is the distinguishing characteristic of the christian religion, that the doctrines it contains, and the precepts it recommends, require no depth of genius, no extraordinary degree of penetration to discover their import:—in this, the learned have no advantage over the unlearned; the most acute philosopher enjoys no superiority over the most uncultivated rustic: the language of the gospel is the language of nature, which the latter can hear with as much satisfaction as the former.—As the light of the natural sun is obvious to all, who do not labour under an impediment of sight, so the glorious rays emitted from "the Sun of Righte-"ousness," present themselves to the view of all who enjoy the exercise of the mental powers, though but in an ordinary degree.

The oracles delivered by the heathen deities were clothed in mystery, and wrapped up in ambiguity, as shunning that light which must infallibly have exposed their absurdity: but the lively oracles of the true God, exhibited in the gospel revelation, court the light, offer themselves to the eyes of every beholder, and prove undeniably that they come from him "who is "light, and in whom is no darkness at all;" and who, like a kind father, expresses his will in a manner intelligible to all his children, not as a harsh master, who will not be at the pains to explain his commands, that he may take occasion rigorously to punish the poor slaves who are left to guess at what would please him. What can be more plain, and at the same time more forcible, than the proposition contained in the text; "if ye love me, keep my commandments?" Our Saviour had now the near prospect of leaving his disciples, and was about to commit to them the propagation of what he so gloriously begun, even the preaching of the gospel to every creature; they were to proclaim to all nations that "he which believeth and is baptized shall "be saved; and he that believeth not shall be "damned."—His meaning then, in these words, is undoubtedly this:—"Would you give a con-"vincing and incontestable proof to all men,

" wheresoever you preach my name, that your " love for your master is ardent and sincere; the " only way you can do it is by a strict obedience " to my precepts, and an exact conformity to " my example:" and what was at first addressed particularly to the disciples, is now addressed to the christian world in general, even to all to whom " the word of this salvation is sent."

In order to the clearer illustration of this subject, I propose to observe the following method. In the first place, to consider what love to Christ is. In the second place, to consider what is meant by keeping his commandments. And in the third place, to point out the necessary connection there is between love to Christ and keeping his commandments.

First, then, we are to consider what love to Christ is. Love to Christ, we conceive, implies the three following particulars; first, veneration; second, esteem; third, gratitude.

I. Let us see in what views the Bible exhibits our great mediator as an object of veneration.— We find him there represented, as " the eternal " word," co-equal with the Father: as " the " brightness of the Father's glory, and the ex-

" press image of his person;" as " king of kings, " and lord of lords, even the king eternal, immor- " tal, invisible, the only wise God:" his name is called, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, " the everlasting Father:—his throne is for ever " and ever, the sceptre of his kingdom is a scep- " tre of righteousness."—What, with regard to men, commands veneration, is superior power, magnificence, or wisdom. Now, where can we meet with all these in so eminent a degree as in him who is all-mighty, all-glorious, all-wise? The power of the greatest earthly monarch is mere weakness, compared to his, who with one potent word commanded all things into being out of nothing; who upholds all his creatures by the same word of his power; who kills, and who makes alive; who, when all mankind shall be sleeping together in the dust, will with one irresistible command, raise all again to never-ending life, and assign to each individual of the human species their eternal station in happiness or misery by his sovereign, irrevocable sentence of absolution or condemnation. The grandeur of the most glorious of the sons of men is but farce and pageantry, consists in poor, airy, external shew, and is subject to be blasted with numberless accidents: but the glory of the great Redeemer consists in the magnificent robes of

meekness, truth, and righteousness, wherein he shines conspicuous, and rides forth in majesty: the lustre of these, no length of time can diminish, no accident make any impression upon. The wisdom of the most enlightened of mortals, what is it but Egyptian darkness, in comparison of that infinite wisdom, which takes in all things, past, present, and future, at one view; which so surprizingly contrived and executed the stupendous works of creation and redemption, and which daily so skilfully orders the affairs of all its creatures? Whether then we admire wisdom, grandeur, or power, where can we find an object so worthy our admiration as him who is all these in a degree of infinite perfection: and must we not then adore with the profoundest veneration our great Saviour in the exertion of all these his glorious attributes, and with wonder break out into the Psalmist's exclamation, "great is our "Lord, and of great power; his understanding is "infinite?" These perfections, however, command only our veneration, and place him only in the light of a great and bountiful Creator and King. But love to Christ implies,

II. Esteem,—as an object of which, he is represented in scripture, as "Emmanuel, God in "our nature; the Prince of Peace; the Lamb of

" God, that taketh away the sins of the world; " the friend of mankind;" as " fairer than the " children of men;" as " the father and husband, " the elder brother, and the good shepherd of his " people." Those virtues which command our esteem with regard to men are, goodness, condescension, meekness, faithfulness, and constancy. —And where can we meet with all these expressed so sweetly as in our loving Redeemer, whose whole life on earth was spent in the exercise of these graces, and who even now, in his glorified state, discovers himself daily in those amiable lights to his own children? The goodness of the best of men is but narrow, circumscribed, confined to an object or two, very often constrained, low, and selfish; but the goodness of Christ is free, unbounded, unmerited, disinterested; it is an ocean without either brim or bottom; extends not to one, or two, or a thousand objects, but is open to all that will share it.— The goodness of the most tender relation may oftentimes relax: even " a mother may forget her " sucking child," and have no " compassion " on the son of her womb;" but Christ will not forget, cannot overlook, any of his children. Condescension among men is estimated according to the distance between the person who shews it, and him to whom it is shewn: which, though

exhibited by the highest enthroned monarch, to the meanest dunghill beggar, even so far as to exchange situations with him; is not, once to be compared with the condescension of "him "who, though he was rich, for our sakes became "poor;" who, though he was "the heir of all "things," was contented to be without so much as a place "where to lay his head;" who though he was "prince of the kings of the earth, did not "think it beneath him to appear in the form of "a servant," and submit to the most servile offices, even to the washing of his disciples feet. The meekness of the mildest son of Adam is apt to be ruffled and discomposed: the jarring passions, that sometimes by turns, sometimes at once possess the breasts of mortals, render it impossible for them to preserve evenness of temper; even a Moses may speak unadvisedly with his lips; but not so the meek and lowly Jesus; "when he was reviled, he reviled not again;" when he "suffered, was buffeted, spit upon, led "from prison, and from judgment, he threatened "not;" when "he was led as a lamb to the "slaughter, or as a sheep to the shearing, he was "dumb, and opened not his mouth." The fidelity of the most constant friend may fail: we are naturally fickle, changeable creatures; what we love most earnestly to day, is often our aversion

before to-morrow; but "whom Christ loves, he "loves to the end; with him there is no variable-"ness nor shadow of turning;" his faithfulness never fails; "heaven and earth" shall sooner "pass away," than his word, his promise fall to the ground:—and thus is he possessed of every quality that can engage our esteem as well as command our veneration.—It is our duty, our delight, to esteem a kind and bountiful master, an indulgent father, an affectionate brother, a zealous and faithful friend. What a flow of affectionate esteem then is due by all, and will be paid by every generous heart, to him who is all these, and much more than all these endearing relations in one, to his people!—But this is not all; there is another ingredient in love to Christ, which in every sensible ingenuous mind will rise fully as high as any of the other two, which was the

Third particular to be illustrated, namely, gratitude.—As an object of this, the Bible represents him to us, as "wounded for our transgres-"sions, and bruised for our iniquities;" as "the "Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the "world;" as "a propitiation" for the sins of lost mankind; as "the good shepherd laying down "his life for the sheep;" and in a variety of other

images no less striking and affecting, which occur in a great many passages of the book of the prophet Isaiah, and through the whole of the New Testament. What, with regard to men, commands gratitude, is a great favour unmerited; and he that is capable of returning evil for good, hatred for love, is justly detested and abhorred, by a mind that is sensible of any thing noble and generous: but the highest possible pitch of human generosity, as the apostle Paul supposeth, is, that "for a good man, peradventure, some "would even dare to die." But what is even that, if human nature be capable of it, in comparison of what Christ has done for every individual member of his family? This will appear in the most striking light, if we consider what Christ is, what he has done, and for whom. He is God, equal with the Father; the second person of the adorable Trinity; possessed of all possible perfection and happiness. This state of consummate bliss, which he enjoyed from all eternity at the right hand of the Father, he, "in the fulness of "time," withdraws himself from, leaves heaven's glory, descends into this world, clothes his bright divinity in a veil of human flesh, wherein he becomes subject to, and fulfils the whole of his own law; submits to all the hardships and sinless infirmities of mortality, and even, at last, to the

hellish torture of being nailed, hand and foot, to a cross; where, after suffering the most extreme and cruel agonies of body, and anguish of soul, he expires, is taken down, and consigned to a sepulchre, where he remains under the power of death, during the space of three days and three nights.—And all this he endured to redeem from the wrath of a justly offended God, a race of poor, miserable wretches, who were left destitute of all means to help themselves, and were even insensible of that fiery deluge of eternal indignation which was ready to swallow them up. Can we then but love him, be grateful to him, who, by suffering so much for us, proved how dear we were to him? We shall, then, sum up all that has been said in one word. Love to Christ consists in feeling toward him all the veneration that is due to a bountiful creator and preserver; all the esteem that is due to a kind, zealous, faithful, and affectionate friend, and all the gratitude that is due to a compassionate Saviour. We proceed in the

Second place, to consider what is meant by keeping his commandments. And here we must go back to the origin of all things, and observe, that when God had at the first created man, he entered into a covenant with him, which pro-

mised eternal life, upon condition of his perfect obedience and conformity to the law of God; and threatened him with death in case he should transgress it. This penalty he by his disobedience incurred—the consequence of which was that he involved all his posterity in the same guilt, as their head and representative, and they were thereby rendered utterly incapable of fulfilling the law, and of course, he with all his posterity, must inevitably have suffered the punishment threatened, had it not mercifully pleased God to open another way of salvation for lost mankind, through the incarnation and sufferings of Jesus Christ, which is the only method whereby sinners can be saved. By this means, we are delivered from keeping the law, as a covenant of works, which is "a yoke neither we, nor our "fathers were able to bear," and therefore this cannot be the obedience our Lord here requires, as a proof of our love to him; for that were to command an impossibility. As man had by his apostacy from God exposed himself to the curse of the broken law, and rendered himself unfit for the keeping of it, Jesus Christ, man's great substitute, by his death atoned for the breach, and in his life conformed himself exactly to all the precepts of the law, which is commonly called his active and passive obedience. By this

God's justice is fully satisfied, and man is freed both from the curse threatened, and the perfect obedience stipulated in the first covenant; but as Christ made the law a rule of his life, and has "in all things left us an example, that we "should follow his steps;" it certainly is to be made the rule of our conduct; and this beyond doubt, is the obedience meant in the text. Our Lord himself tells us, he was "not come to destroy "the law and the prophets, but rather to fulfil."— The best and surest way of illustrating this head, will be in our Saviour's own words; the greatest part of his Sermon on the Mount, of which we have a transcript in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew, is employed in explaining his sense in the precepts of the law; which as he observed in the strictest manner himself, so he recommends to the practice of his followers. The language of the law is, "Thou shalt not kill;" but Christ says, "Thou shalt not so much as be "angry with thy brother without a cause;" thou shalt not speak maliciously, no, not even lightly of him; on the contrary, thou shalt spare no pains to be reconciled to him, to gain his good will, if he have aught against thee. The law says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But Christ requires even "purity of heart;" requires the "cutting off, and plucking out," what is dear

to us, as " a right hand or a right eye;" when it comes in competition with our duty. The law allowed a man to turn away his wife at pleasure, upon giving her a writing of divorcement; but this was inconsistent with the law of christianity as well as of nature, which requires that persons united in that tender relation, should bear with each other's infirmities, and not separate upon every trivial occasion; and therefore our Lord condemns and forbids this unnatural practice, unless only in case of an irreparable injury on the part of the wife. The law says, " Thou " shalt not forswear thyself, but perform to the " Lord thine oath;" but Christ says, " Swear " not at all, by any manner of oath; but let your " communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for " whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil." The law says, " An eye for an eye, and a tooth " for a tooth;" but Christ says, " Resist ye not " evil, but whosoever shall smite you on the right " cheek, shall do you the greatest injury, rather " than resent it suffer it over again." The law says, " Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate " thine enemy;" but Christ says, " Love your " enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to " them that hate you, and pray for them which " despitefully use you and persecute you." This he recommends by the example of the merciful

and bounteous Father of all, who "maketh his "sun to rise on the evil and the good, and send- "eth rain on the just and the unjust." After he had thus signified his meaning of these precepts, he proceeds to inculcate the practice of humility and self denial, in performing acts of charity, in the duty of prayer to God, and of solemn fasting and humiliation, by exposing the practice of hypocrites in these particulars, who court the applause of men, rather than that of God, and of their own consciences. He then encourages a forgiving temper of mind toward our brethren of mankind, by reminding us how much we are indebted to the pardoning mercy of God; and a spirit of dependance upon God for the good things of this life, by shewing the inefficacy of our anxious carefulness about them, and the providential regard of God toward all his creatures, even the meanest, and the most insensible. He next recommends a charitable frame of spirit by presenting us with a view of our own weakness, of our own failings and infirmities, which ought to make us sparing of our censures, and neither too ready, nor too harsh in passing judgment upon the actions of others. In fine, he recommends the universal observance of that rule in our dealings with mankind, "All things whatsoever ye "would that men should do to you, do ye even

"so unto them."—A rule worthy so great an author. After this, it would be folly, it would be presumption to attempt a further illustration. We proceed then, in the

Third place, to consider briefly the necessary connection there is between "Love to Christ" and "keeping his commandments," or following his example, which we take to be one and the same thing; and this will evidently appear, by just going over the particulars of the first head. Is Christ a creator, a king, a prince, a lord, a master, a father? and are we his creatures, subjects, servants, followers, disciples, children? Do we pay him the veneration that is due to him in all these relations?—How do we, how can we, make it appear any other way than by the observance of whatever he has commanded us, and given us an example of in his own person?—Would not that man be reckoned impudent to the last degree who should say he had a very strong affection for a gracious earthly prince, if at the same time he were in a state of open rebellion against him?—Would an indulgent, worthy master be satisfied with his servant's professing great love to him, if, notwithstanding, he should act in direct contradiction to his commands? Would a kind earthly teacher think his

scholar really loved him, let his professions be what they might, should he despise his dictates? Or would a tender earthly father be pleased with a favourite son, would he or any one else believe that son had the affectionate reverence for him which he pretended, if he contemned his advice and trampled upon his authority?—How can Christ then, or how can the world be satisfied of the love of that man to his Saviour, who wilfully transgresses what he has in the strongest manner enjoined him, both by precept and example?—Again, is Christ a brother, a friend, yea, "a friend "that sticketh closer than a brother," and do we profess to be his friends? The only way we can evidence it, as he himself in another place tells us, is, by doing "whatsoever he has commanded us," and then "we are his friends indeed."—— Would not that man be reckoned very hollow hearted, whatever his protestations might be, should he, in disregard of all the social ties, betray the interest of, or do what he is certain would be, in the highest degree, grievous, disgusting, and offensive to an affectionate friend, who studied his good in every thing, and was in himself worthy of the highest esteem?—and, last of all, has Christ given the noblest proof of his friendship, that could possibly be given? Has he died for his enemies to make them his friends?

and do we pretend to have the most grateful sense of what he has done for us? Let us shew it by being to one another, as much as in us lies, what Christ has been, and is to us. Can any man say, he is deeply sensible of what Christ has done for him, and at the same time indulge an ungenerous unforgiving temper toward his brother? or, to sum up all that can be said, in one word, can he live in the habitual wilful omission of any duty, or the habitual wilful practice of any sin, which are the very thorns which crowned the head, the very nails which pierced the hands and feet, the very spear which stabbed the side, and the very pangs which wounded the soul of the almighty compassionate Saviour? If we really love our Redeemer, we will keep his commandments, and they "are not grievous" but joyous, "in keeping them there is great reward: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his "commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not "in him. A new commandment I give unto you, "that ye love one another, as I have loved you "that ye also love one another. By this shall all "men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have "love one to another: he that hath my com-"mandments, and keepeth them, he it is that "loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be "loved of my Father, and I will love him, and

" will manifest myself unto him. Let your light " so shine before men, that they may see your " good works, and glorify your Father which is " in heaven." Let us " walk in love, as Christ " also hath loved us, and given himself for us;" the period is fast approaching when he " will " come again and receive all his unto himself, " that where he is there they may be also;" his commandment is life everlasting: " in his pre- " sence there is fulness of joy, at his right hand " there are pleasures for evermore: wherefore, " my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovea- " ble, always abounding in the work of the Lord, " forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not " in vain in the Lord,"

SERMON XXIX.

PSALM ciii. 1—5.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;
Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

ON THE DUTY OF PRAISE.

THERE is hardly a case or circumstance that can occur in life to which we will not find something adapted in this book of psalms. Here we are taught how to rejoice, and how to mourn, how to address God in prayer, and how to praise, how to perform the public, and how the private duties of religion. Here, as examples of, and incentives to devotion, we are presented with the divine breathings, the heartfelt emotions of a few of the most shining Old Testament worthies, in

all the variety of circumstances they experienced under the light of God's countenance, and the hidings of his face; under prosperity and adversity, under distress of body, and anguish of mind; in the exercise of hope and fear, joy and grief, confidence and despondency. But of all the exercises becoming a creature and child of God, there is none which has a greater share in these writings, as indeed there is none we have greater occasion to be employed in, than that of praise and thanksgiving. This is, indeed, "our rea-"sonable service;" and if we reflect that this duty, above all others, is the employment of angels in heaven, and of "the spirits of just men "made perfect," and will be our own to all eternity, if ever we are made "partakers of the in-"heritance of the saints in light," it will appear most natural and most reasonable that we should be much engaged in it while on earth; for though it were not our bounden duty, the joy and delight which results from it is a motive sufficient to engage us to a practice so agreeable—let me add, that in the exercise of this duty above all others, our natural inclinations are most gratified. We all wish to appear before God with something of our own. There is nothing which he expects of us, nothing he will accept from us, but humble gratitude, but a heart that receives

his gifts with thankfulness. Let us proceed, then, to illustrate this great and necessary duty, by considering the obligations we are under to it, taking the psalmist for our guide. "Bless the "Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me "bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my "soul, and forget not all his benefits."

This duty is by no means a piece of external form, does by no means consist in the expression of certain words, or in the agitation and posture of certain parts of the body—no, any person, and at any time, may perform all the outward acts of devotion without a single spark of the real fervor of it: accordingly we find a heavy charge to this purpose against the people of the Jews: "This people draw near me with their "mouth, and with their lips do honour me; "but have removed their heart far from me." But thanksgiving is an act of the soul, it is the overflowing of a heart pierced with a deep and grateful sense of benefits received, diffusing itself over all the powers and faculties both of body and mind, communicating itself to the voice and features by means of that wonderful sympathy which subsists between the corporeal and spiritual parts of man, whereby they are mutually affected with each others feelings, enjoying and

suffering in concert. Not but that this divine exercise is frequently performed, and no less agreeably to him who is the object of it, in the still raptures of silent gratitude. The soul is not always able to express what it feels, nor indeed is there occasion for words to him "who seeth "the heart, who knoweth the thoughts afar off;" who is not to be imposed upon by false appearances, but can easily distinguish between the empty noisy shew of hypocrisy, and the unaffected simplicity of true religion. There has been an objection raised against the reasonableness both of this duty and that of prayer, from the consideration of God's immutability, and the infinite distance there is between us and him. For what purpose, it has been said, should we pray to God, as if he would alter what he has absolutely decreed, for any thing we can say? and to what purpose praise him, as if a few words pronounced by us, by creatures so infinitely below him, could add any thing to his glory? but this is the most frivolous way of arguing that can be imagined. We pray to God, not that we expect our prayers should prevail upon him to alter the word that he hath spoken; but in the first place, because he has expressly commanded us so to do, then, as it is a testimony of our submission to him; and dependance upon him; and lastly, as this duty

has a direct tendency to promote our increase in all the graces and virtues of the christian life. For while we pray unto God—"lead us not into "temptation," we will certainly endeavour to avoid temptation, or else we act a very inconsistent part; while we pray for strength to overcome such and such a corruption, we will naturally set ourselves to mortify and subdue it; while we pray for the conferring of such and such a grace, we will certainly make it our business to acquire it; while we pray for our brethren of mankind, we will thereby learn that universal charity and benevolence which are so ornamental to a christian. In the same manner we may vindicate the duty of praising God; not because our doing so makes any addition to his glory; by no means; but because he requires it from us, and because it is a real benefit to ourselves. One who is strongly under the influence of any passion, we see by daily experience, is much eased and relieved by giving vent to it, to instance, in the passion of grief: a heart oppressed with a load of this kind, finds immediate relief by venting itself in words or tears; in like manner, a soul overcharged with a sense of what God has done for it, naturally has recourse to humble praise and adoration to disburthen itself. Surely, then, we have the highest reason to call, with the psalmist, upon our

soul, and all that is within us, to bless the Lord; nay, we have infinitely greater reason, by how much our mercies and privileges exceed his. The psalmist, in the most beautiful language, in another psalm recommends this duty from the agreeableness of it; and at the same time, points out the seasons that are peculiarly proper for it: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the "Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O "Most High: to shew forth thy loving kindness "in the morning, and thy faithfulness every "night." What so natural when we awake from sleep in the morning, and recover the use of our reason, which had lain for a while suspended, when we behold the returning light of another day, and the face of nature renewed by the cheering rays of the sun, what so natural, what so delightful, as then to offer up the pure incense of a thankful heart, to him who "causeth the outgoings "of the evening and the morning to rejoice," and who will, at last, raise these our bodies from the sleep of death in the morning of the resurrection to immortal glory and honour, that so we may be ever with "God and with the Lamb, who "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his "own blood?" Again, when we are going to lay ourselves down to rest at night, when we recollect the various mercies of the past day, the pro-

tection we have received, the rich provision that is made for our bodies, the continued bounties of that kind and gracious Providence, which from day to day furnisheth us with "food to eat, and "raiment to put on;" but especially when we recollect the far greater things God has done for our souls, the superlatively rich provision that is made for them, and that greatest and best gift which he has bestowed upon the human race, his own eternal son Jesus Christ; when we reflect on all this, must not the emphatical words of David force themselves upon us? Shall we not be constrained to cry out, "Bless the Lord, O our "souls, and all that is within us, bless his holy "name: bless the Lord, O our souls, and forget "not all his benefits."—"Who forgiveth all our "iniquities, who healeth all our diseases?" He begins with blessing God for personal favours, and as the first and greatest of these, for pardoning mercy. The pardon of sin is an introductory blessing to all others, for till the sinner is at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, he never can reap any benefit or comfort from the promises of the gospel. The scripture represents the soul of man as polluted and diseased by sin, in the same manner that the body is by any loathsome noxious distemper. As a person therefore labouring under bodily sickness

is incapable of relishing any of the comforts of life, so unable is a soul labouring under a load of unpardoned guilt to draw any satisfaction from the blessings and privileges held out to us in the word of God. The psalmist, we find, makes use of this very image in the last clause of the verse: "Who healeth all thy diseases:" and the prophet Isaiah is still more descriptive to this purpose, "The whole head is sick, and "the whole heart is faint; from the crown of the "head to the sole of the foot there is no sound-"ness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrify-"ing sores:" and indeed every one who will be at the pains to look into his own breast, and observe the disorders sin has introduced there, or into the world around, and behold the devastation it has spread over mankind, must be more and more convinced of the justice of these descriptions, and consequently be more deeply sensible of the obligations we are under to that infinite goodness which has found out a way of recovery from all these evils. As a farther ground of thankfulness for the goodness of God, let us observe the extent of it, "Who for-"giveth all thine iniquities"—it extends to all sins, however many in number, however heinous and aggravated in their circumstances. Indeed Providence seems to have set up David as a monu-

ment of the greatness of divine mercy, that none might despair—few can charge themselves with such aggravated guilt as his, though the most innocent and perfect stand exposed to the wrath of a just God. Mercy is then in our offer: Mercy which makes no exceptions, rejects no object, but only requires of the most guilty sinner to repent, forsake, and live. "Who redeemeth thy life from "destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-"kindness and tender mercies." Who redeem-"eth thy life" or soul "from destruction." The effect of natural distempers is death; all the maladies we are subject to, tending to the destruction or dissolution of the body; in like manner sin must necessarily, at last, produce the death and destruction of the soul.

To conceive aright, therefore, of the blessing which the psalmist here praises God for, let us reflect, in the first place, on the vast worth and importance of our souls; and, secondly, on the dreadful import of the word destruction.

Let us first, I say, reflect on the vast worth of our own souls. The soul is a spiritual, immortal being: the breath of God himself, which must necessarily exist for ever. It is a being susceptible to the highest degree of joy

and grief, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery: its faculties boundless, extending themselves through the immensity of space and time; rising up to the throne of God himself, the great sovereign of heaven and earth, and descending to the lowest abysses of hell; recalling past ages, and subjecting them to a present review, and stretching forward to those which lie buried in the womb of futurity; making them as though they were; in a word, comprehending heaven, earth and hell, time and eternity. Such is the nature of that spirit in man, which the almighty Creator "breathed into his nostrils," when he made him "a living soul." From which, let us turn our eyes to a view of that terrible destruction which threatens it, and in which, did not mercy prevent, we must all be involved. But what tongue of man, angel, or damned spirit is able to describe all the terrors of that wrath and fiery indignation which God hath laid up for sinners as the portion of their cup?—This destruction of the soul is not mere annihilation, the reduction of its powers to a state of non-existence. No, this prospect, gloomy and shocking as it is, were a paradise, to the misery which must be the lot of every unrepenting sinner. The scripture hold it out to us under every image that can convey dread and horror to the mind. It is called

"the second death," that killing death which rends the soul from God for ever. It is termed a prison, a dark and gloomy prison, where peace and rest can never dwell, where hope never comes, from which no possibility of escape is left for the wretched prisoner, and where nothing is to be heard but the voice of "weeping, and wail-"ing, and gnashing of teeth." To convey the most frightful ideas, it is called "the lake that "burneth with fire and brimstone for ever," a "bottomless pit," into which the guilty wretch is still sinking deeper and deeper in misery. But even such representations as these convey but a faint idea of the inexpressible horrors of this dismal state; all the enlarged powers and faculties of the soul above described being made subservient only to the purpose of adding to its misery. And is not redemption from this an endless ground of praise and thanksgiving? especially if we consider the infinite price that was paid for it, which was no less than the precious blood of the eternal and only begotten Son of God. "Herein," indeed, "was love, not that we loved "God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to "die for us, that whosoever believeth in him "might not perish, but have everlasting life." Let us here again therefore take up the words of the psalmist, "Bless the Lord, O our souls,

" who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and " crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender " mercies." If ever there was expressive language this is it: every word is full of the most transporting meaning. The pardon of sin, and redemption from that misery which is the consequence of it, great as they are, do by no means exhaust the plenitude of the love of God, which is no less graciously expressed in the positive blessings he confers upon us; he not only saves from death and hell, but likewise crowns with immortal glory and happiness, bestows a competent portion of the good things of this life in advance, as an earnest of his love, and a pledge of much greater and better spiritual blessings beyond death and the grave; nay, is graciously pleased frequently to give his people, even in this life, a foretaste of those rivers of pleasure which flow at his right hand for evermore. These are, in a peculiar sense, the good things the psalmist mentions in the next verse: " Who satisfieth thy " mouth with good things, so that thy youth is " renewed like the eagles." Man, in his natural state, has no desire after spiritual good things, does not see the value, nor feel his need of them; hence we are apt to imagine ourselves " rich, and " increased in goods, and standing in need of " nothing," and see not that we are " miserable,

" and wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked." Such men, therefore, God sends empty away, but " filleth the hungry," such as feel their wants and needs, " with good things."—" Blessed," says our Lord, " are they which do hunger " and thirst after righteousness, for they shall " be filled;" filled with all the fulness of God, with all the fruits of the Redeemer's purchase, filled with peace and joy in believing in him, " whom having not seen we love, in whom, " though now we see him not, yet believing, we " rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." They shall be filled with the very things they most covet and desire, with a sense of God's favour, and love in Christ; with peace of conscience, with the light of that countenance which can cheer and comfort in the midst of worldly troubles and distresses, with the well-grounded hope of a blessed immortality. So that, adds the psalmist, " thy youth is renewed like the eagles." We have the very same image beautifully expressed by the prophet Isaiah, " even the youths " shall faint and be weary, and the young men " shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the " Lord shall renew their strength; they shall " mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run " and not be weary, they shall walk and not " faint." Several naturalists assure us, that the

eagles, in reality, after a certain revolution of years, I think it is seventy, when they seem to be decaying and drawing near the period of their existence, suddenly recover their health and vigour, and begin, as it were, a new course of life. Whatever be in this, it is very certain that this bird retains the full exercise of all its senses, particularly the sight, to a great old age; and the notion of its growing young again may probably have arisen from the long continuance of its life and strength, compared with those of man; either way, it presents us with a beautiful resemblance of the life of a christian. Of the wicked, it is said, "they shall not live half their days, but the righ-"teous shall flourish like the palm tree; they shall "still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be "fat and flourishing."—Often, indeed, it appears to be otherwise, and the desponding soul is frequently ready to cry out with Heman, "My life "draweth nigh to the grave, I am counted with "them that go down into the pit; I am as a man "that hath no strength; free among the dead, "like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou "remembrest no more, and they are cut off from "thy hand:" and with Asaph, in the seventy-seventh psalm, "Will the Lord cast off for ever, "and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy "clean gone for ever, and doth his promise fail

" for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gra-
" cious, hath he in anger shut up his tender mer-
" cies?" Such have, in all ages, been the complaints of God's people; but though " weeping " may endure for a night, joy ariseth in the " morning."—All these trials and afflictions they are visited with, serving to quicken and call forth into action those graces which are the life, health, and vigour of the soul, and making them cleave faster unto God, who is all their strength, and all their salvation. Let us now observe the beautiful manner in which David appropriates all these blessings to himself. " Bless the Lord, who for-
" giveth all *thine* iniquities, who healeth all *thy*
" diseases, who redeemeth *thy* life from destruc-
" tion, who crowneth *thee* with loving-kindness
" and tender mercies, who satisfieth *thy* mouth
" with good things, so that *thy* youth is renewed
" like the eagles." It is matter of the highest comfort, that God is a gracious and merciful being, a God who " forgiveth iniquity," who " healeth " diseases," who " redeemeth from destruction;" but unless we can lay claim to these characters of goodness, we are so far from being benefited by this endearing account of the Deity, that, on the contrary, it must aggravate our misery, to think that such mercy is to be had, but that we have " no part nor lot" in it—if we were afflicted

with any bodily indisposition, and heard of a physician who was infallible for curing it, that he was likewise kind and tender hearted, one who loved to employ his skill in behalf of distressed objects, all this would give us very great satisfaction, no doubt; but our joy would only be complete on being assured that this physician was ready to undertake our own cause, and had already taken some steps toward performing our cure. Let us rejoice in this, then, that God excludes none from his mercies; salvation is to all, all who feel their need, who are sensible of their misery, who are willing to forsake their sins, and embrace their Saviour. Unbelief alone can prevent this mercy from taking effect. It must be entirely owing to ourselves if we are not able to say, every one for himself, in the words of David, "I will bless the Lord, who forgiveth all *my* iniquities, who healeth all *my* diseases, who redeemeth *my* life from destruction, who crowneth *me* with loving-kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth *my* mouth with good things, so that *my* youth is renewed like the eagles."

The improvement of this subject is obvious. Let us, with gratitude and thankfulness, embrace these gracious offers of mercy and forgiveness,

while " God still waiteth to be gracious;" let us not " sin because grace doth abound," remembering that goodness and patience abused, despised, and neglected, adds fuel to the wrath of God, when once it is kindled. " The day of " grace" will not last always; but that God, who is now seated on a throne of mercy, will soon appear clothed in terrible majesty, seated on a throne of judgment, to render " vengeance to all " who know not God, and obey not the gospel." To this purpose, allow me to read to you one of the most awful passages of the whole bible, to every obstinate, impenitent sinner: " Because I have " called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my " hand and no man regarded; but ye have set " at nought all my counsel, and would none " of my reproof; I also will laugh at your cala- " mity, I will mock when your fear cometh; " when your fear cometh as desolation, and your " destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when dis- " tress and anguish cometh upon you. Then " shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; " they shall seek me early, but they shall not " find me: for that they hated knowledge, and " did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would " none of my counsel; they despised all my re- " proof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of " their own way, and be filled with their own

" devices*." And, " if the word spoken by an-
" gels was stedfast, and every transgression and
" disobedience received a just recompence of re-
" ward, how shall we escape if we neglect so
" great salvation?" If " he that despised Moses'
" law died without mercy, of how much sorer
" punishment shall he be thought worthy, who
" hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and
" hath counted the blood of the covenant an un-
" holy thing, and hath done despite unto the
" spirit of grace." And it is indeed " a fearful
" thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
On the other hand, " rejoice in the Lord, ye
" righteous, and again I say, rejoice:" think frequently on what the Lord has done, and still is doing for you, and while you muse let the fire of gratitude burn, and let it be expressed by the tenor of your lives: a life conformed to the gospel is the best proof that can be given that we believe it, without this all protestations and professions are to no purpose; they will not deceive even our fellow creatures, and it is impossible for us to deceive " Him who seeth not as man
" seeth."—" Having these gracious promises and
" prospects, let us, therefore, cleanse ourselves
" from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, per-
" fecting holiness in the fear of God."

* Prov. i. 24—31.

SERMON XXX.

EPHESIANS ii. 8.

For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

ON SALVATION BY GRACE.

"GOD, who at sundry times and in divers "manners, spake in times past unto the fa- "thers by the prophets, hath in these last days "spoken unto us by his Son;" bringing "life "and immortality to light" by his gospel; revealing in the clearest manner where our happiness lies, and the way that leadeth to it. So that in us is fulfilled, in the strictest sense, that prophecy of Isaiah, "the people which sat in dark- "ness have seen a great light, and to them which "sat in the region and shadow of death, light is "sprung up." What the prophet here represents under the notion of darkness, and the region and shadow of death, is more largely described by our apostle in the beginning of this chapter; which exhibits to our view a very dismal and affecting picture of the deep guilt, the

abject slavery, and the deplorable misery of mankind by nature, in the emphatic phrases of being "dead in trespasses and sins, walking according "to the course of this world, according to the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that "worketh in the children of disobedience, having our conversation in the lusts of the flesh; "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the "mind, and being by nature the children of "wrath." A representation so just, and so comprehensive, that every man who is capable of observation must therein discover his own express likeness, and thereby be convinced of his natural degeneracy and wretchedness.—It seems, and with the greatest judgment indeed, designed by the apostle as a prelude to the glorious scene he was about to open, that being deeply impressed with a sense of what we once were, we might, with warmer expressions of love and gratitude, acknowledge and extol the amazing goodness of God, in raising us from such a depth of misery to such an exalted pitch of glory and happiness, which he accordingly, with a peculiar beauty of expression, proceeds to illustrate: "God," says he, "who is rich in mercy, for his great love "wherewith he loved us, even when we were "dead in sins, hath quickened us together with "Christ, and hath raised us up together, and

"made us sit together in heavenly places in "Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might "shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his "kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus." And in the words of the text, in order to check any risings of pride, which might be the consequence of such high privileges, and surpassing dignity, he points out the original spring of all this blessedness, even the free undeserved goodness of God, to the utter exclusion of human worth and power. "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that "not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The apostle, well aware of that vanity, that haughty self-confidence, which are so apt to swell the hearts of men, does not think it sufficient barely to mention our obligation to the divine goodness, but again and again insists upon it, as a matter of the highest importance to be known and believed, and therefore as it were forces it upon our consideration; "by grace are ye saved, "not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of "works."

In discoursing from this subject, I propose, first, to explain the import of the terms grace and salvation, their nature and extent; secondly, I shall endeavour to state the true and proper notion of saving faith; thirdly, prove that the salvation of every sinner, is wholly and only

owing to the grace of God, to the utter exclusion of all worth and merit in themselves. I am,

First, to explain the import of the terms, grace, and salvation, their nature and extent.—The word grace is used in a great variety of senses in the New Testament,—sometimes it is used to signify the New, or Gospel Dispensation, in opposition to the Mosaical: "the law was given "by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus "Christ."—"Ye are not under the law, but un-"der grace." The grace of God which bringeth "salvation, hath appeared to all men;" and in many other places to the same purpose. It frequently signifies the gifts and operations of the Spirit of God upon the souls of men. Thus, "I "thank my God always on your behalf, for the "grace of God which is given you by Jesus "Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by "him, in all utterance and in all knowledge, so "that ye come behind in no gift*."—"With great "power gave the apostles witness of the resurrec-"tion of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was "upon them all†:" it is used in this sense too, in that usual valedictory blessing with which our apostle concludes most of his epistles, "grace "be with you all," which he sometimes enlarges into, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and

* 1 Cor. i. 4. † Acts iv. 33.

" the love of God, the Father, and the commu-
" nion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." It is used to signify the whole of christianity, both practice and profession, " looking diligently lest " any man fail of, or fall from the grace of God*," that is, apostatize from the christian religion; but, to mention no more, grace in its most usual and proper import signifies, the free, unmerited love and favour of God, in pardoning the sins of men, and admitting them to a state of peace and reconciliation with himself, for the sake, and on account of the merits of his own Son Jesus Christ; and that, not only without any respect of, but, on the contrary, in direct opposition to the good works of which they may boast. The apostle states this distinction with the greatest accuracy and precision, in his epistle to the Romans; " Even so then at this present time also there is a " remnant according to the election of grace. " And if by grace, then is it no more of works: " otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it " be of works, then is it no more grace: other-" wise work is no more work.†" In this last sense of the word it is evidently used here in the text, as the very same distinction between grace and works is kept up as in the passage just now cited; " by grace are ye saved, and that not " of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of

* Heb. xii. 15. † Rom. xi 5, 6.

"of works, lest any man should boast;" which we may paraphrase thus: "Ye who were once "dead in trespasses and sins, under the power "and dominion of Satan, and of consequence "children of wrath, and heirs of hell, are now "quickened together with Christ; inspired with "a principle of spiritual and divine life, and "raised to the blessed hope of a glorious immor-"tality, and of sitting together in heavenly "places, with Christ Jesus: but it will certainly "be the greatest folly, presumption, and ingrati-"tude to ascribe this, or any part of it, to your-"selves; for it is only because God is rich in "mercy, and out of that great love wherewith "he loved us, that we are delivered from all this "wretchedness, and raised to all this glory and "happiness; and therefore it becomes you hum-"bly to adore, and admire the abundant grace, "the unmerited, unsolicited love and goodness "of God, to which you are so infinitely in-"debted."

I am next to explain the nature of the salvation here mentioned, or what we are to understand by being saved. In order to do this more distinctly, it will be necessary to consider shortly the sense given to this whole passage by some commentators, who present to us a very narrow and limited view of this salvation, by restricting

it to a favourable change of external circumstances merely; "the apostle," say they, "is "writing to Gentiles, who, before the light of the "gospel shone upon them, were buried in hea-"thenish superstition and idolatry: and to this "ignorant, stupid, condition of theirs, he opposes "their present agreeable circumstances in the "enjoyment of the gospel revelation, whereby the "means of salvation were afforded them, which "upon their belief and obedience to the terms "of it, would undoubtedly be conferred upon "them." According to this view, the description in the beginning of the chapter of those Ephesians as being dead in trespasses and sins, alludes to their situation as heathen idolaters, their being subjected to "the prince of the power "of the air," to that worship they paid to demons and false divinities. And the salvation here celebrated in such high terms, will, of course, amount to no more than a bare possibility of discovering and forsaking their former errors, and a sufficiency of means to instruct them in the doctrines and practice of christianity. All I shall say in answer to this is—that whatever sense of a word or phrase is most correspondent to the author's main scope and design, is undoubtedly the true and proper one; if we attend therefore to our apostle's evident aim through the

whole of this epistle, namely, to magnify the riches of free grace in the redemption of mankind, it will appear in the clearest light, that this salvation must be taken in a much more august and sublime sense. It was doubtless an instance of the most amazing goodness in God to afford any of the guilty race of Adam the means of knowing their natural wickedness, and to point out the way whereby they might be delivered from it. But as this, alas, could have availed us but little, considering our utter inability to embrace even the terms of the gospel, considering our weakness, blindness, guiltiness, how gloriously is the goodness of God magnified, in not only pointing out the way that leadeth on to life, but supporting us in it; administering repeated supplies of courage and strength; conducting us as it were by the hand through all the dangers and difficulties that oppose our progress to endless glory and bliss, and at last putting us in the actual possession of them. By being saved then, is here meant not only those spiritual blessings which the people of God enjoy in this world, such as deliverance from the guilt and reigning power of sin, "peace of conscience, "joy in the Holy Ghost," support and comfort under all the troubles and afflictions this mortal state is subject to; but likewise, that per-

fect, that exalted, that enduring bliss, that "eter-
"nal weight of glory," which the redeemed of the Lord shall be made to possess beyond death and the grave. This consists of two parts, first, of a deliverance from all those miseries which are the consequence of our apostacy from God; and second, of the enjoyment of all that happiness which is the purchase of Christ's death. What, and how great are the torments inflicted upon the wicked in hell, it is impossible for us to conceive, far less to describe; and this misery we are all born heirs to, "being by nature the children "of wrath:" but a deliverance from it is not the whole of gospel salvation; it implies likewise the actual possession and enjoyment of all the positive blessings of the heavenly state. I proceed in the

Second place, to state the true and proper notion of saving faith. Faith, in the New Testament, stands generally for the complex of christianity, in opposition to the law, which as generally stands for the complex of the whole Mosaical dispensation. The reason why faith is put to signify the gospel, seems to be this: christianity being a federal religion, founded upon certain conditions, on the one hand, God himself revealing to man, a system of doctrines, which he is to

believe, of rules, which he is to follow, and backed with certain promises for our encouragement, and threatenings to alarm us, the whole confirmed by a course of miracles, as the last proof that this revelation does come from God; and on the other hand, man receiving this revelation, embracing these doctrines, binding himself to observe these rules, and trusting to these promises, and particularly his believing these grand articles of christianity, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he came into the world clothed in a human body to recover mankind from the ruins of the fall, and for this end died upon the cross, after he had by his life and doctrine fully instructed the world in the will of his heavenly father; the belief of all these, I say, which is properly faith in Jesus Christ, is frequently represented as the great and only condition of the covenant on our part; because in reality, whoever firmly believes these, must of course acquiesce in the whole of the gospel scheme, the preceptive as well as the promissory part of it, must submit to Christ as a prophet and king, to instruct and govern, as well as a priest to save. Further, there is a distinction most carefully to be observed here, between the condition upon which salvation is offered to us, namely, our faith; and the consideration that moves God to offer his

grace and salvation to us; these two are essentially different, and by no means to be confounded together; the latter is a dispensation of his mercy, in which he has regard to his own attributes, to the honour of his laws, and his government of the world, so that he may appear at once a just ruler and a merciful creator; the former, is the method in which he applies this dispensation to us, so that it may answer such ends as may both be perfective of human nature, and at the same time suitable for a Being who is infinitely holy to pursue. We are never to imagine, then, that the condition upon which salvation is offered to us is the consideration that moves God, as if our faith were the efficient cause of our justification before him. This is purchased solely by the death of Christ, which God, of his infinite mercy and love, having decreed for us, salvation is on that account said to be by grace, there being nothing in any of the guilty posterity of Adam that either did or could have procured such an invaluable blessing. But still, "our faith," which must be a "faith that purifieth the heart, which worketh "by love, which overcometh the world," and consequently includes our hope, love, repentance, and new obedience, is what qualifies us to receive the benefits of this redemption and free

grace; from which, we hope, it will appear evidently, how we are saved freely, or by grace, and at the same time through faith, as the condition indispensibly necessary on our part. I therefore proceed in the.

Third place, to prove that the salvation of every sinner is wholly and only owing to the grace of God, to the utter exclusion of all worth and merit in themselves. This will appear if we consider, first, the natural depravity, weakness, and corruption of mankind. Had man continued in his estate of primitive purity and perfection, in the full exercise of all his faculties and powers, and in a perfect obedience to the will of his Creator, which he was then capable of, no doubt he would have at last been rewarded with immortal glory and happiness; yet even in that case, he could by no means have merited such happiness; as his very being, and all its concomitant endowments, by which he would have been qualified for it, were originally the free gift of God, and his remaining in that state must have depended entirely upon continued communications from the great fountain of all grace and strength. How much less then is man, in his present state of weakness and depravity, able to merit any thing at the hand of God, to merit

such a salvation as was formerly described; now that his glory is defaced, his strength wasted, his understanding darkened, his will corrupted, his affections perverted, when he not only has lost the power of procuring happiness, but, alas! has also reduced himself to a state of the most deplorable misery, out of which it is absolutely impossible for him to extricate himself! That person must know very little of human nature, and of himself, who is not sensible of an utter incapacity in him to perform all the commandments of God, a perfect obedience to which, is the sole condition that can have any pretence to merit—but the notion of merit in the sight of God has something in it so daring, so unsuitable to the condition of a creature, and a fallen creature, something so like buying and selling with our Maker, that it is impossible for any one who reflects ever so little on the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being, and on what he is himself, to admit it without horror. But further, in the second place, it will appear that salvation is owing entirely to grace, if we consider, that God could have inflicted upon guilty man the penalty of his broken law, without injuring any of his attributes, nay, on the contrary, to the more gloriously magnifying the most shining of them, his holiness and justice. To what, then, but a flow

of the most amazing, the most disinterested goodness, can we attribute a scheme, seemingly opposite to the eternal righteousness of the divine nature, and the sole aim of which evidently is to recover out of the most abject wretchedness, and to raise to the most exalted bliss, a race of rebellious, lost apostate creatures, who were unable to help themselves? The plan of redemption by Jesus Christ is so entirely suited to our condition, so perfective of the honour and majesty of the divine administration, and so wonderfully calculated to promote our everlasting welfare, that nothing but an excess of the most brutish stupidity, as well as of the basest ingratitude, could ever stand out against it, or endeavour to diminish its glory. I add in the third place, salvation will appear to be by grace, if we observe, that though God had determined to save some of the lost race of mankind, nothing but free unmerited love could have prompted him to make choice of one more than another. It was only that the election according to grace might stand, and because "he will "have mercy on whom he will have mercy, "and compassion on whom he will have com-"passion," that he chose Jacob, and refused Esau, when the children were yet unborn, neither had done good or evil. Surely, indeed, there is nothing in the most perfect of the sons of men,

to merit the attention of a Being infinitely holy and perfect. How can a creature, who, in the emphatical language of the prophet, "from the "crown of the head to the sole of the foot, is full "of wounds, bruises, and putrifying sores," that is immersed in guilt and misery, be acceptable in the sight of that God, who cannot look upon sin nor sinners without abhorrence and detestation? Blessed, ever blessed, therefore, be his name, that we have so sure a word of prophecy as this to place our hopes in, that we are "predestinated "unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ "to himself, and that only according to the "good pleasure of his will."—That "he makes "known the riches of his grace on the vessels of "mercy, which he had afore prepared unto "glory."

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly and distinctly as I could, to illustrate this important subject: I shall, therefore, conclude with just mentioning a few short inferences which flow from it, and,

First, should not this delightful doctrine of salvation by grace be embraced by lost sinners with all humility and self-abasement? If our redemp-

tion from the curse of the broken law of God, in all its steps, from the first original spring, to its final consummation, be entirely and only the work of God, as we have already shewn, what room is there left for human worth or merit? If we have received all, "why should we boast, as if "we had not received?" Let us, therefore, divest ourselves of pride, the most hateful of qualities a creature can have in the sight of God, the most unsuitable to the condition of a fallen lost creature; this, however, of all the remains of the old man probably adheres to us the most closely: it insinuates itself into the darkest and most retired corners of our hearts, and discovers itself on many occasions, when we least suspect it, and is only to be overcome by continued communications of grace and strength from the great fountain of all grace; let it therefore be the constant and fervent subject of our prayers, at a throne of grace, that we may be delivered from the fatal influence of this dangerous enemy of our souls, and that we may be clothed with humili[illegible]h is "in the sight of God of great "pri[illegible]

Secondly, this doctrine should be attended to, and received with gratitude and thankfulness.

What a complication of mercies does this great scheme of gospel salvation contain, what an endearing display of all the glorious attributes of the Deity; "mercy and truth met together; right-"cousness and peace embracing each other;" "God reconciling guilty sinners to himself, not "imputing their trespasses unto them;" and at the same time, satisfying the strictest demands of justice in the punishment of sin, "so loving "a guilty world, as to give his only begotten "Son for it, that whosoever believeth in him, "should not perish, but have eternal life: Bless "the Lord, therefore, O my soul; and all that "is within me, bless his holy name!"

Thirdly, our gratitude to God for all these manifestations of grace must shine forth in our new obedience—"shall we sin, because grace doth "abound?" Shall we turn this dispensation of mercy into an argument for fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind? God forbid: but let it teach us to "deny ungodliness and worldly "lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world:" proving to the world, and to our own consciences, that we are indeed the children of God, the objects of redeeming love, the heirs of eternal life, by living "as be-"comes the gospel of Christ." The

Fourth and last inference I shall draw is, the inexpressible misery of those who have no part nor lot in this matter, "who know not God, and who obey "not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ;" who never concerned themselves whether they were interested in this scheme of salvation or not, but go on in a sluggish inconsiderate course, sit down contented to be "without God in the world" —who know themselves to be strangers to God, and at enmity with him, and yet have learned the unhappy art of saying, "What is the Almighty "that we should serve him, and what profit should "we have if we pray unto him?" And no less miserable is the situation of those, who build their hopes of happiness and salvation on any other foundation than what is laid even Jesus Christ; for "there is salvation in no other, there is no other "name given under heaven whereby we may be "saved, than the name of Jesus." May God, by his grace, convince all such proud pretenders to merit, all such despisers of the Saviour, of the emptiness of their hopes, of their danger and misery, that they may return to the Lord from whom they have revolted, before iniquity prove their ruin; and may all of us be enabled suitably to improve the means of grace, and to his Name be praise. Amen.

SERMON XXXI.

HOSEA vi. 1.

Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

FOR A FAST DAY.

ON RETURNING TO GOD.

THOUGH scripture were entirely silent on this head, our own sad experience might sufficiently convince us, that by nature we are estranged from God, and of consequence from true and solid happiness. The almost universal and daring impiety which prevails in the world; that open contempt of all religion which possesses one part of mankind; that carelessness and indifference which, like a deep lethargy, lulls asleep another; and that coldness, deadness, and backsliding which too frequently overtakes even God's own people, sufficiently warrant, at all times, especially upon a day of solemn fasting and humiliation, the propriety of addresses, such as that con-

tained in my text, "Come, and let us return un-
"to the Lord." I propose, first, to explain the
exhortation; and, secondly, to enforce it, particu-
larly from the motive in the following context:
"For he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath
"smitten, and he will bind us up."

First, to explain the exhortation: "Come,
"and let us return unto the Lord;" and this ex-
hortation, in the first place, implies, that man
was once in a state of nearness unto God. This
was the case of our first parent, whom "God
"created in his own image, and after his own
"likeness," in all the dignity of innocence and
enlarged understanding. When we look back to
that glorious and happy period of his existence,
and behold one in our own nature, qualified for
the enjoyment, and actually enjoying the friend-
ly, the gracious presence and converse of his
great Creator, with what humble rapture must
our hearts burn within us, to view our fellow
creature, our kindred clay, in a condition so hap-
py, and so elevated: to view God himself, the
greatest and the best of beings, the centre of all
perfection, the source of all felicity, condescending
to the lowness of his own creature, vouchsafing
to be his guardian, his guide, his father, his
friend. Then was man near unto God, while sin

was as yet unknown; but nature and holiness were the same thing; while as yet the law of God was the study and delight of his rational creature; while reason and practice went hand in hand, and conscience smiled approbation upon every action; while as yet no ignorance, error, or prejudice clouded the understanding, no perverseness or corruption domineered in the will, no disorder reigned in the affections; but the human soul was a transcript of the purity of the eternal mind. Then was man near unto God, when his desires were heavenly, when communion and fellowship with his Maker were all his delight; and this glorious state of affinity was built upon the combined ties of the most close and the most endearing relations, even those of a gracious Creator, and an exalted, though submissive creature; a kind and benevolent father and an affectionate child; a bountiful benefactor and a grateful dependent; all the glorious attributes and perfections of the One, interested to secure and promote the happiness of the other, and all the powers and faculties of man, on the other hand, devoted to the service of his God—this was then the delightful connection, the blessed nearness between the divine and the human nature.—But in the

Second place, To "return unto the Lord" implies, that man is now naturally at a distance from God. This, experience, fatal experience, confirmed by the word of God, loudly proclaims; for though "God made man upright, yet he hath "sought out many inventions." "Man that was "in honour continued not." God, indeed, by reason of one of the most essential attributes of his nature, cannot be very far from any of us, for his omnipresence filleth heaven and earth, encompassing us behind and before, and on every hand—no where can we go without the extent of his dominions, to no place beyond the limits of his government; but, alas! by nature we are strangers to him, and aliens from his affection: we are indeed, and must be subjects of his government; but then we are guilty rebel subjects, traitors against the dread majesty of heaven and earth: we are indeed the creatures of his almighty power; but then we are lost, apostate creatures, and altogether unworthy of his notice: we are the children of his providence; but we are stubborn, "disobedient, and gainsaying children," outcasts from the family of heaven, adopted children of the devil, and heirs of hell. Here every thing is reversed. "How is the crown "fallen from our heads; how is the gold become

him, and the fine gold changed." The present state of man is so widely different from that of primitive holiness and integrity, the constitution of his nature was so totally overturned by his fatal apostacy from his Maker; sin, like a loathsome leprosy, marring the beauty and wasting the strength of the human soul, that the once glorious and perfect child of God is hardly discoverable in the now guilty polluted slave of sin and Satan. Thus are we far removed from God. The guilty criminal naturally shuns the presence of his judge. We see the first sad effect which sin had upon our grand progenitor, Adam; it inspired him with dread and apprehension; it prompted him to fly from the face of God, whom he formerly met with humble delight: having lost the image of God, which constituted a moral nearness to him, he wanted, if possible, to create a real local distance from him, and this is the condition of man by nature to this very day. We come into the world in a state of alienation from God, for we are born in a state of pollution and defilement, with hearts and dispositions bent upon evil, and that continually, and equally averse to what is good; hence that propensity which so early discovers itself to what is forbidden, and that backwardness and reluctance to perform our duty. From the one no bridle is able to restrain;

to the other, no power can impel; and as if our natural distance were not great enough, we are by our own actual transgressions making it greater and greater every day—we are ready to do any thing rather than part with our sins, rather than return unto God. But in the

Third place, the exhortation in the text, "Come, let us return unto the Lord," implies that it is an absolutely necessary duty; and it certainly is so, if happiness be a desirable thing, and if we would wish to escape misery, for what is the fearful doom of those who are far from God? The psalmist informs us, "they that are "far from him shall perish." Our eternal interest is then at stake, our great all is depending, the life, the happiness of our precious and immortal souls. For as sure as the Lord liveth, he will punish with everlasting destruction those who obstinately keep at a distance from him; and we are no less bound by motives of gratitude, than of duty and of interest, to return unto God, for is not the condescension of Almighty God great and wonderful, who thus "waiteth to be "gracious," who is still exalted upon a throne of mercy ready with open arms to receive returning sinners, when we had the greatest reason to apprehend, that he would no longer appear but in

the character of an incensed and an inexorable judge? Is it not matter of comfort to reflect that we have to do with a Being so good and so merciful, who discovers so much reluctance to punish, and such readiness to forgive? But have we not much higher ground of apprehension, if all this grace shall have been bestowed upon us in vain? It is an awful denunciation in the first of the Proverbs: "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices*."—And surely "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And now it may be enquired, seeing that man once was in a state of favour with and

* Prov. i. 24—31.

near unto God, both in a natural and moral sense, seeing that he has fallen from and lost that happy state, and seeing that a return unto this great source of life and happiness is a duty absolutely necessary, it may be enquired, I say, how is this great duty to be performed? How are we who are thus "far off to be brought nigh?" I answer in the words of our Saviour himself: "No man "can come to me, except the Father which hath "sent me draw him." By our fatal apostacy from God, we are become weak and helpless, as well as guilty and polluted creatures, and in vain should we hear addresses, such as that in the text, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord," did not the same Spirit which inspired these addresses and exhortations, likewise dispose our dead flinty hearts to comply with them. And this ought to be the ground of our joy and rejoicing before God, that we are not left to the direction of our own carnal corrupted reason, which, alas! is but too ready to mislead us, nor to the strength of our own natural powers, which are so miserably reduced, that we are not left to grope in the dark, to guess at what will be pleasing unto God, for "life and immortality are now "brought clearly to light." In a word, it is matter of the highest joy, that the terms of our acceptance with God, are no longer a perfect

obedience, for the consequence of that were absolute despair; but that "we who by nature and wicked works are afar off, are now made "nigh by the blood of Christ." Here, then, we have a full and satisfying answer to all enquiries upon this head; when, with Thomas, we are reduced to doubts and uncertainty about the way which leadeth to the Father, "I," says Christ, "am the way, and the truth, and the life, no "man cometh unto the Father but by me." We will find then the exhortation of the prophet equivalent to that direction of the apostle to the jailor, who came to him with the important enquiry, "What shall I do to be saved? Believe on "the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, "thou and thy house," for "there is no name "given under heaven whereby we may be saved, "but the name of Jesus;" no way of peace and reconciliation with God, but in and through the merits and mediation of his eternal Son. And to you, my christian friends, is the word of this salvation sent; to you is the call directed this day— "Return unto the Lord, to-day then, while it is "said, harden not your hearts; suffer the word of "exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto "dear children." You are called upon in God's gracious and wise providence on this day, set apart for solemn fasting and humiliation, to con-

sider from whence you are fallen, you are called upon to rend your hearts, and not your garments, to mourn over and to forsake your sins, that so iniquity may not prove your ruin. Suffer me then to enforce the exhortation, and to press you to a speedy compliance with it; and

First, I would address myself to such as live in the open and avowed neglect of all religion, if any of this character act so inconsistently with it as to attend the assembly of God's people upon such an occasion as this; and I would have you, my friends, to think a little upon the folly of your conduct. Do you really believe that there is a God? This, though perhaps unwillingly, you must acknowledge; but do you know and consider what is necessarily connected with his existence, spotless holiness, infinite wisdom, strict justice, and almighty power? and none of these, O sinner, are of thy party, and in vain will you dream of ease and happiness, so long as you and these are at variance. Do you think that God will suffer the majesty of his laws to be insulted, without inflicting condign punishment upon the transgressor? or that he takes no notice of human affairs? You either do not reflect at all, which is the more charitable supposition, or if you do, in whatever estimation you are held in

the world, I will venture to say, "thou fool;" for what folly is equal to that of defying omnipotence, and running the risk of damnation, [illegible] your precious soul a thing of no consequence to you? are eternal chains to be trifled with? is incensed omnipotence an object of neglect and disregard? But thou art not only foolish, but ungrateful—and what character is more odious and detestable? What do you think of the man who is capable of repaying good with evil? love with hatred? Do not you esteem him the disgrace of human nature, the pest of society? Undoubtedly he is—in what colours then shall thy ingratitude be painted? it is black as hell; the devils themselves never had it in their power to contract guilt of such a malignant nature as yours; they were "shut up in everlasting chains under dark-"ness;" they never heard the glad message of peace and reconciliation; they never had the offer of a Saviour. And has God been employed from all eternity in contriving a scheme of salvation for you, O sinner, and do you hold it unworthy of your acceptance? do you consider what is the plain language of such a conduct? you thereby in direct terms accuse God of folly, in contriving a scheme of salvation that was unnecessary, or, which is equally atrocious, of contriving a scheme so rigid and severe, that it is

better to perish than comply with it. And are you able to make good your charge? have you [illegible] like God? can you thunder with a [illegible] like his? and do you know what is the most violent of all resentments? love repaid with scorn. Blush then, O blush at thy conduct; "it is of "the Lord's mercy that thou art not consumed, "for his compassions fail not;" and shall this very long-suffering, which should lead thee to repentance, serve to harden thee in thy impenitence? Think, O once more think of thy danger; where would thy landing be, were God this night to require thy soul at thy hand? Conscience will, in one word, answer the question. And can you "dwell with devouring fire?" are you resolved upon taking up your residence "with everlasting "burnings?" Thou art condemned already, even now "the wrath of God abideth upon you;" the flaming sword of eternal justice hangs over thy guilty head, and waits but till death strikes the parting blow, to kill thy sinful soul. But I would rather invite you, O foolish creatures and unwise, by the more tender and alluring calls of the gospel: guilty and ungrateful as you are, your case though dangerous is not desperate; there is still hope concerning you: even now Christ "stands at the door and knocks," and tenders unto you that mercy which you have hi-

thereto despised. O then, "kiss the Son, lest he "be angry, and ye perish from the way."—"Now is the accepted time, now is the day of "salvation."—"Be persuaded in this thy day, "to know the things which belong to thy peace, "before they are hid from your eyes." Even now the Saviour stands with outstretched arms ready to receive you. Let the language of your heart be, "I come, Lord do thou bring me to thyself. "Draw me, I shall run after thee; Lord, I believe, "help thou mine unbelief." I would, in the

Second place, press the exhortation in my text, upon the careless and the indifferent:—"What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, and call "upon thy God." Can you enjoy a moment's rest, so long as your God is your enemy? how can you say, "peace" to yourselves, "when "there is no peace?" You are like one asleep upon the top of a mast, ready to be tossed into the vast ocean with the next gust of wind, or the next motion of the ship; but dreadful may the awakening be. You are suspended over the bottomless pit by the slender thread of life, which ten thousand accidents may cut asunder, and in you drop beyond the reach of hope. And can you still sleep on? for God's sake bestir yourselves, shake off this stupifying lethargy, lest

it prove to your souls the sleep of death. Were your house burning about you, were the flames bursting into your bed chamber, even at the dead of night, you would start up and fly with the risk of every thing to save yourself; were but your neighbour's house on fire, or one in the same street, or even in the same town, apprehension or sympathy would keep you awake. But your situation, O careless sinner, is a thousand times more dreadful; the flames of divine wrath surround you on all hands, and are ready to burst in torrents upon you, and yet you can indulge undisturbed repose. It is an inhuman disposition to wish to make a fellow creature unhappy; but would to God I could give any sinner of this character such a picture of himself as would day and night disturb his repose, till he sought and found rest only in the favour of a reconciled God. In your situation, the greatest cruelty is to spare; compassion, affection, apprehension upon your account, every motive of tenderness and concern are engaged to bring you to a proper sense of your danger. God has been visiting you year by year, in the language of the parable, in expectation of fruit, and has as long spared and admitted to further trials. God knows, you may now be in the last stage of your probation, and tremble to think of the next visit;

may be to put in execution the dreadful sentence, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the "ground?" Fly then, without delay, [redacted] for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before you; let it henceforth be the great study of your life to acquaint yourself with the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, that ye may be at peace; and that you may not be overtaken with the horrors of eternal night, while you are still at enmity with God. In the

Third and last place, I would address the exhortation of my text to the fallen backslidden children of God. Be of good courage, my friends, you have not to do with a harsh and severe master; but with a kind and tender-hearted parent, who does not cast off his children, though they "fall "from their first love." Ungrateful indeed you are, and ungrateful I am sure you think yourselves, to revolt against so mild a government, to throw off your allegiance to so gracious a sovereign; and meet it is that you should be humbled for your faults; meet it is that you should be laid low in the dust before your offended God and Saviour, and it is professedly with this intention that you came up hither to-day. Come then, with the returning prodigal, and say: "Father, "I have sinned before heaven, and in thy sight,

"and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" and you may rest assured of the prodigal's welcome. Your heavenly father has already provided for you the best robe; the "rich cloth-"ing, the wedding garment," with which Jesus is ready to invest you, is the unspotted robe of his own imputed righteousness.—Look then "upon him whom by your sins you have pierced." Now is the season for you to enquire and examine into your hearts, that you may discover the traitor which betrayed you into folly, which stole your affections from your God and father, and let no blind partiality to your beloved lust incline you to spare or pity; it is for your life to discover where the plague lies. And now again, "join yourselves to the Lord in an everlasting "covenant," and let your resolution, through grace, be, "What have we any more to do with "idols? we will never again return unto folly." Do not risk the dreadful consequences of another departure from God. And let all of us be exhorted to "return to the Lord;" let it be our "hearts desire and prayer to God" this day, that he would, by the gracious influences of his holy Spirit, increase our faith and inflame our love; that he would fill our souls with that "godly sorrow which "worketh repentance;" that he would strengthen, confirm, and perfect our resolutions and en-

deavours to love him more and serve him better; and "may the God of peace, that brought again "from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shep- "herd of the sheep, through the blood of the "everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every "good work to do his will; working in you that "which is well pleasing in his sight, through "Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and "ever. Amen."

SERMON XXXII.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 33.

For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

ON AFFLICTION.

DAILY experience affords a strong confirmation of this truth, that "man is born to trouble "as the sparks fly upward:" hence it was, that among several nations, the birth of a child was celebrated with mourning and loud lamentation, as the commencement of sorrow and distress; and, on the contrary, their funerals were accompanied with mirth and joy, as the glad termination of a miserable existence. Wherever we turn our eyes, if our own afflictions will permit us to look around, we behold nothing but scenes of woe, an innumerable tribe of ills extending their cruel devastations over the whole human race; sickness, and pain, and poverty wasting the bodies; anguish, and despair, and distraction overwhelming the minds of poor mortals; and from this view of

human nature it was, that some of the ancient philosophers represented the Deity as a capricious cruel being, who delighted in, and sported with the sufferings and miseries of his creatures; as they could not reconcile the notion of infinite goodness and mercy in the governor of the world with that universal face of calamity which overspread it. But, blessed be God, our holy religion teaches us a far more consolatory doctrine, teaches us the divine art of turning even our bitterest trials into the most wholesome cordials. In discoursing from this subject, I shall, first, briefly illustrate the proposition contained in the text, then enquire into the more obvious causes and ends for which the Almighty lays his afflicting hand on men; and, lastly, point out the improvement we ought to make of dispensations of this sort. I am,

First, briefly to illustrate the proposition contained in the text, namely, that "the Lord doth "not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of "men;" and this will appear, first, from the consideration of the general and ordinary method of procedure in God's government of the world. We see, from every day's observation, that God does not immediately punish, nor in the degree they deserve, the offences of even the worst of men;

on the contrary, we frequently see the highest acts of mercy and goodness returned for the highest, the most daring instances of impiety and disregard for the great Author of nature. What man would bear from his fellow so much and so long, as the great and omnipotent God every day bears at the hand of frail, impotent, presumptuous mortals, whom his power could crush in a moment; that God who is vested with the awful prerogative of destroying both soul and body in hell for ever?—We, frail sons of a day, are for snatching at every opportunity of wreaking our vengeance on those whom we imagine have injured us; but God pities, and desires to reclaim even the wretch who dares openly and avowedly to trample upon his authority, yea, who has the hardiness to attack, as much as impotence can, his sacred person and character. Why does God delay the execution of that awful sentence, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still?" Why, but because God punishes us much less than our iniquities deserve; why, but to prove in the most endearing manner, that so far from "afflicting willingly," so far from unnecessarily grieving the children of men, he in the most tender compassion to them suspends the punishment even where it is due, in order to

afford them space for repentance.—Farther, of all the characters of the Deity under which he is pleased to exhibit himself to us, there is none he seems so much to delight in, as that of good and merciful: indeed the whole united scheme of creation, providence, and redemption, is one continued display of these darling, these endearing attributes. When he would give us a description of himself, it is mercy, mercy in all the different ways of expression: "The Lord, the Lord God, "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and "abundant in goodness and truth;"—"Shew-"ing mercy unto thousands, forgiving iniquity, "transgression, and sin."—"I am he that blot-"teth out thy transgressions, and will remem-"ber thy sins no more." Add to all this, the express, the repeated declarations he so often condescends to make to this purpose:—"Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the un-"righteous man his thoughts, and let him return "unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon "him, and to our God, for he will abundantly "pardon. The mountains shall depart, and the "hills be removed, but my kindness shall not de-"part from thee, neither shall the covenant of "my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath "mercy upon thee."—"Can a woman forget "her sucking child, that she should not have

" compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they " may forget, yet will not I forget thee." And that there may be no room to doubt, he is graciously pleased to confirm it with an oath: " Say " unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, I " have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; " but that the wicked may turn from his way " and live." Hence, likewise, those expressions of grief, and reluctance to punish when the sins of nations, or of individuals, have rendered punishment absolutely necessary; as in that by the prophet Isaiah: " Why should ye be stricken " any more? ye will revolt more and more;" or that tender and affectionate exclamation: How " shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I de- " liver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as " Adonah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? My " heart is turned within me, my repentings are " kindled together." Surely, then, we have the greatest reason to conclude with the prophet; " the Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve " the children of men." I am to enquire

Secondly, into the more obvious causes and ends for which the Almighty lays his afflicting hand upon the children of men. The first and most obvious cause, and which indeed is the ground of all, is sin, " that evil and abominable

" thing which the Lord hateth," and cannot overlook; even in those he loves best: that fatal leprosy has overspread the whole earth, wherever there are men, there also is guilt, and consequently there must be also punishment. " Where-" fore," then, " doth a living man complain, a " man for the punishment of his sins?" There is a peculiar beauty in that question in the context; it seems to imply this:—" Dost thou still live, " oh man! has God been so gracious as yet to " spare thee in spite of all thy provocations " against him? art thou still out of hell, the just " reward of all thy wickedness? and darest thou " to murmur at a little temporary punishment, " which, had strict justice been rendered thee, " should have been infinite and eternal? how " canst thou presume to complain, when God " punishes thee so much less than thy iniquities " deserve?" Most of the miseries which befal men, are, indeed, the natural, the necessary consequence of sin, though we do not consider the interposition of a righteous governor of the world. Thus we see remorse and beggary necessarily follow extravagance and prodigality. Intemperance is constantly accompanied with diseases. Infamy and contempt are the ordinary and natural reward of falsehood and fraud: these vices have in their own nature a tendency to produce such ef-

fects, were there no intelligent Being who presides over the universe, to inflict them, in the character of a just judge—so that, generally speaking, the miseries of men are the actual productions of their own hands: in other cases, where the particular cause is not so evident, yet still the universal cause sufficiently manifests the wisdom and justice of the divine administration. As all have "sinned and come short of the glory of God," so all are liable to punishment, for that same God who displays himself to us, under all the glorious titles of mercy and goodness, in order to check the presumption of sinners, subjoins to these that he "will by no means clear the guilty." That sin may not go unpunished, not only his enemies, but his dearest children must suffer, nay, his own eternal and well-beloved Son must bleed. What then art thou, O man! against whom the Almighty may have stretched out his hand, who darest to murmur at the dispensation? art thou still in thy sins, at enmity with thy Maker, bidding defiance to both his power and his goodness; and dost thou think it strange if enraged Omnipotence, if offended patience and mercy at last rise up against thee, and wound thee in thy conscience, thy person, or thy enjoyments, and make thee to feel something of that eternal vengeance thou despisest? How much

less is it than thou deservest, seeing thou art not yet finally miserable, seeing thou art yet an object of mercy. Or, art thou a child of God, an heir of eternal life and glory, having "fled for "refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you," and is God making you to "eat the bread and "drink the water of affliction?" Ask thy heart, O believer, is there not a cause? Do not many remains of corruption still adhere to thy soul? dost thou not daily offend against light and against love, by carelessness and remissness in duty, by actual and frequent deviations from the paths of righteousness, into "those ways, where-"in destroyers go?"—Think then on the dreadful cause of all thy sufferings, and of all the misery that is in the world, and marvel not if offended holiness and love should sometimes make thee to feel how evil and bitter a thing it is to depart from the Lord. Remember, at the same time, that it is the express will and appointment of your heavenly Father, that "through manifold tribu-"lations ye should enter into the kingdom of "God;" and for your comfort in tribulation, rest assured that the "light afflictions which are but "for a moment, are working for you a far more "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Adore the wisdom, the justice, nay, the mercy of the severest dispensations of Providence toward thee,

and bless the Father of mercies, that by grace thou art delivered from the fear of eternal misery; "It is of the Lord's mercy that we are "not consumed, for his compassions fail not." I observe farther under this head, that the afflictions with which the Almighty visits the children of men are very frequently remarkably suited to punish particular sins. The rod is made, as it were, vocal; to utter distinct, intelligible sounds; is inscribed, if we may venture so to speak, with the sins of which those suffering under it have been guilty, whereby they are made to see "the "rod, and him who hath appointed it," to read their sin in their punishment. Is there any thing so common, for example, as to see disobedient and unnatural conduct to parents, punished by the disobedience and unnatural conduct of children? Detraction and defamation are likewise generally repaid in kind: immoderate attachment to "this world and the things thereof," is punished by the deprivation of "the desire of the "heart and of the eyes;" cruelty and violence to others usually meet with the like treatment in return; in a word, infinite justice seems concerned singularly to punish remarkable offenders, in a manner adapted to the offence, and that to the conviction, not only of themselves, but frequently to that of the world around. I proceed to men

tion a second end for which the Almighty lays his afflicting hand upon the children of men; namely, the purging away of sin. As infinite justice is concerned to punish sin, so we have the satisfaction of observing, that infinite goodness is no less concerned to make these punishments subservient to the gracious purposes of reclaiming and reforming the sinner. The psalmist seems to have had a due sense of this, when he says, "It is good for me that I have been af-"flicted, that I might learn thy statutes;" indeed there is not, there cannot be a more dangerous situation to virtue than a course of constant, uninterrupted prosperity; and therefore the all-wise Creator generally trains his children in the severe school of adversity: we are naturally vain and light creatures, apt to be puffed up with any superior gifts of nature or of fortune, apt to forget ourselves when we are distinguished by any external circumstances of elevation; rank and affluence usually engender pride and self-conceit, the certain sources of almost every other vice; particularly of the hateful qualities of malice, envy, and detraction toward our superiors, and of insolence, contempt, and hardness of heart toward those in an inferior station; and we are thereby led, instead of gratefully acknowledging the gracious source from which we derive all our

comforts, to overlook the bountiful hand that deals so liberally with us. But more wholesome adversity teaches us a very different lesson; tells us in language, in which flattery bears no part, that we are but men; poor, weak, helpless creatures, altogether insufficient to our own happiness—tells us that there is a God upon whom we depend for "life, and breath, and all things;" teaches us to be humble, and self denying, and to sympathise with the miseries of our fellow men; and for these reasons prosperity has been, by some, compared to the undiscerning affection of a fond indulgent mother, which often ruins the child; but the adversity with which the Almighty visits mankind, to the affection of a wise father, who would have his son to labour, to feel disappointment and pain, that he may gather strength and acquire resignation and fortitude. And yet how often does an undistinguishing world judge in a manner directly opposite; esteeming the gifts of fortune, as they are called, to be proofs of the divine favour, and poverty and distress, on the other hand, to be marks of God's displeasure; not reflecting that "whom the Lord loveth, he "chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he "receiveth;" that he distributes good and evil, happiness and misery in this life, not as rewards and punishments, but as proofs and trials; and

from numberless facts drawn both from sacred and profane history, as well as from daily experience, it appears beyond a doubt, that prosperity is a more dangerous probation than adversity. David, while oppressed and persecuted, displayed a bright pattern of every amiable grace and virtue; but when at peace and rest in his kingdom, he falls a prey to ungovernable passions, and proves a murderer and an adulterer. His wiser son, Solomon, while he had to struggle with the difficulties of establishing a tottering throne, shews himself truly pious and religious—shews himself humble, modest, chaste; but with all his superior wisdom, he is not able to withstand the allurements of uninterrupted ease, affluence, and power; but is thereby unhappily betrayed into effeminacy and idolatry. The good Hezekiah, whose life was a shining example of piety and virtue, yet is not proof against the snare of prosperity; but elated with the joy of two great deliverances from a formidable hostile invasion, and a dangerous bodily indisposition, his heart gives way to pride and vanity. The truth is, there are many secret seeds of corruption in the heart whose existence we do not so much as suspect, but which immediately discover themselves upon being roused by a proper temptation. Hazael, when told by the prophet of the "great evil"

that he would "do to the children of Israel," exclaims, and undoubtedly with a strong mixture of indignation at the supposition that he was capable of such enormous wickedness, "What, is "thy servant a dog, that he should do this great "thing?" yet the very next day he commits the atrocious crime of murdering his master. The most hardened sinner may recollect the period when he would have shuddered at the very idea of those iniquities which he now commits with greediness; it is, therefore, from ignorance of ourselves that we often wish for an alteration in our condition, which, were God to grant it to us, might prove our destruction. The intention of the Almighty in all his dispensations toward men is to make them wiser and better; and surely he knows what are the most proper means to accomplish his own ends. What strange creatures would men be were they indulged in all their extravagant humours, wishes, and desires; when they are so proud, so puffed up, so thoughtless and giddy, notwithstanding all the motives they have to humility and consideration. I add farther, that it is, perhaps, absolutely necessary, in order to our relishing the sweets of life in a proper manner, that we should taste a small mixture of its bitterness. We are little sensible how much we owe to God for the blessing of health,

till we come to be deprived of it; we undervalue the common blessings of Providence so long as they abound, till poverty cometh "as one that "travelleth," and points out their real worth. Whilst we prosper in all our undertakings, we little regard the over-ruling Providence which gave a blessing to our endeavours, till we are brought to reflection by feeling what it is to be disappointed; then are we constrained to acknowledge that "except the Lord build the "house, they labour in vain that build it: except "the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh "but in vain." I now proceed to mention a

Third end for which the Almighty afflicts men; and that is, to wean them from this world. Were our existence indeed confined to the narrow limits of this mortal state, had God designed us to pass only a few transitory years on this earth, it might have been reasonably expected that we should have enjoyed uninterrupted happiness; but as this life is merely a preparation for the more important part of our existence, and as nothing more obstructs our views of immortality than an attachment to sublunary enjoyments, God, in mercy, in pity to our souls, deprives us of these, to shew us the folly and the danger of seeking our happiness, and setting up our rest

in this world: he would not have us to bestow our chief attention upon the toys and baubles of mortality; he would not have the creatures whom he has designed for immortal glory, whom he has raised to the blessed hope of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away," engaged solely in contriving "what they shall eat, "what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall "be clothed." That therefore which we blindly and rashly consider as the wound of an enemy, is most frequently the necessary chastisement of a kind and tender parent; for though "no chas-"tening for the present seemeth to be joyous, "but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yield-"eth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to "them which are exercised thereby."

The fourth, and last end of afflictions which I shall mention is, to improve our virtue, particularly the graces of patience and of resignation to the divine will. There cannot be a more delightful, a more improving spectacle, than a gracious soul surrounded on every side with trouble and distress, but still holding fast its integrity, still adoring, reverencing, loving the hand that inflicts, still resigning, still submitting, still addressing the Almighty in these terms:—"Thine, O "Lord, it is to command, and mine it is to obey;

"thine it is to dispose, and mine it is to submit."—"Father, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from "me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."—"What am I, that I should dare to challenge "the justice of thy proceedings?"—"It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

The improvement of this subject is obvious: wouldst thou be fortified, O man, against afflictions of every sort? wouldst thou wish "in "patience to possess thy soul? We pray you in "Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God;" secure thy Maker for thy friend, by embracing the offers of mercy and pardon which he is this day making you in the gospel. What a glorious representation of the Deity have we here! "The "Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, "long suffering, and abundant in goodness and "truth, shewing mercy to thousands, forgiving "iniquity, transgression, and sin," When we had exposed ourselves to the wrath of Omnipotence, which justly could have adjudged us to the endless torments of "the worm that dieth not, and the "fire that is not quenched;" when we were altogether unable to deliver ourselves out of our miserable condition; "when there was no eye to "pity, no hand to save;" when the pit was just ready to open her mouth and swallow us up,

then the Lord himself, the offended Sovereign and Judge, appears for our salvation, in a manner how wonderfully calculated to express both his displeasure against sin, and his love to lost mankind. Need I represent to any, who have been born and brought up in the bosom of Christianity, who are acquainted with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the exceeding love and condescension of God, in giving up his own eternal Son to the death, that men "should not perish, but have "everlasting life;" and at the same time his indignation against sin in requiring such a sacrifice for it? "Glory be to God in the highest," who hath wrought out such a salvation for us, who "thought on us in our low and lost estate," and provided such a Redeemer. Blessed be God, that by Christ's meritorious sufferings and death we are delivered from eternal misery, and made heirs of never ending glory. In the blood of Christ you will find a healing balm for every wound, however deep and painful; a remedy for every distemper, a supply for every want, and a perfect enjoyment of every hope. How happy the situation of that man who can say, upon good ground, in the midst of distress, "the Lord "is my strength, and my salvation."—"What "though trouble like a tempest surrounds me "on every side; what though I be encumbered

" with an infirm and sickly body; what though I have to struggle with poverty, as with an " armed man; what though I be deprived of that " which I loved as my own soul; what though my " dearest, fondest wishes and expectations have " been blasted, yet still I am a child of God " through Jesus Christ; my God is my portion." Upon this I rest, as upon a rock, and can bid defiance to every storm of adversity. What, " though my earthly house of this tabernacle be " dissolved, I have a building of God, an house " not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." But, oh! how miserable must the situation of that man be who has no such support " in " the day when trouble cometh?" who is conscious that his Maker is his enemy, and that all the afflictions which befal him here are but " the " beginning of sorrows?" Oh, that all such would speedily lay to heart their danger, their misery, and improve the day of grace while it lasts! that they would be wise to improve the dispensations of Providence, the strokes they receive, as monitors to return unto the Lord from whom they have revolted, that so iniquity may not prove their ruin. May God enable all of us to glorify him in whatever we do, or whatever we suffer, and to his name be endless praises. Amen.

SERMON XXXIII.

JOB xxx. 23.

For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.

ON THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH.

THERE is no truth which the holy scripture more frequently and more warmly inculcates than this, that man is born to die: the voice of experience loudly proclaims the same, and the language of reason and reflection, if attended to, must undoubtedly bring it home to ourselves—addressing every one of us in the words of the prophet to David, "Thou art the man;" thou art subject to the universal law; in a very little time thou must resign thy being, and be reduced to the same state with all the preceding ages and nations of the world, which have been successively swept away with the besom of destruction.

The order and frame of nature are big with the seeds of corruption and dissolution, and these bodies of ours are so constructed, that though

we were exempt from the outward accidents by which life is often destroyed, and those inward distempers whose violence every day carries off mankind by thousands, and ten thousands, they would of themselves fade, wither, and die away; the springs of life would by little and little relax, the wheel stand still, motion would utterly cease, and man become a lump of insensible earth.

The certainty and universality of this event then is deducible from the course of nature, and the constitution of our bodies, as well as from the supreme positive will of God, which, as part of the punishment of sin, has given death a commission to extend its dominion over the whole human race. As this then is a subject in which all of us, and at all times are equally interested, whatever be our station or situation in life, it never can be improper to lead our attention this way, for there is nothing so likely to engage us to live well, as the remembrance that we are one day to die—as it is chiefly owing to a neglect of this awful truth, that we are so indifferent about the great objects which religion offers to our consideration.

It is proposed, then, through the divine assistance, in discoursing from this subject, to consi-

sider death in the following views:—first, as the separation of the soul and body; secondly, as a removal from this world with all its employments, pleasures, and troubles; thirdly, as the commencement of an eternal state; and then to lead to the practical use of these considerations.

First then, death is the separation of the soul and body. I shall not, at this time, go about to prove either the existence of the human soul, or the immortality of it, independent of, and separated from the corporeal part, as I am persuaded that every one now hearing me is fully satisfied of the truth of these particulars; and though we are ignorant of the nature and manner of the union which subsists betwixt the two constituent parts of man, that there is in reality such an union, we need little argument to be convinced of, and indeed an union of the closest kind it must be, as we find each of them affected in the most sensible manner with whatever affects the other—the soul taking part in all the sensations of the body, whether pleasurable or painful, and the body in its turn participating in all the emotions and passions of the soul; and so intimate, so tender is their mutual sympathy, that nature is shocked and shrinks back at the thought of separation, and by its strongest principle is unceas-

ingly actuated to retard this gloomy event. Hence that unremitted care of the soul, to preserve its companion in beauty, in health, in vigour, that tender anxious concern, when it is likely to fall into decay, that pain when it suffers, and that joy when it recovers and revives. Hence, on the other hand, that assiduous tendency of all the bodily senses to procure, and convey pleasure to the soul, and that languor or disquiet which takes possession of it, according as the soul is depressed or violently agitated, so that there is between them a perpetual strife of mutual affection, each aiming at conveying delight. Death then is the dissolution of this union, in consequence of which, the spiritual and corporeal parts of man are wholly disjoined, and indeed very differently disposed of: "the body returns to the "dust from which it came, and the spirit to God "who gave it." The former consideration how humbling, the latter how awful. Those bodies, which we now take so much pains in adorning, cherishing, pampering, will ere long be stretched out pale, ghastly, and loathsome; a clod of common earth, a morsel for the crawling worm—the ceremonies subsequent to death are in their nature awful, and the sight of a funeral is ready to strike a damp into the mind. He must be very insensible who can, unmoved, behold a fellow creature, one who but the other day was engaged

in the same pursuits and views with himself, and who perhaps had as fair prospects of long life and happiness, carried out to his long home, cut off in the midst of his schemes and projects, his hopes blasted, and his designs reduced to nothing. When nature calls upon us to perform the last sad duties to our own departed relations, our feelings must be still more lively and pungent; and if a beloved friend, in whom our soul delighted, claims our sorrow—if affection, as well as duty and humanity, represents death to us as the final separation between us, and what we love as our own souls, we must be still more deeply concerned; but how much more lively must be our emotions, how much more affecting the scene, when we bring the case home to ourselves, when we view ourselves as parties in all the sad solemnities of death, by such reflections as these: "Yet a little while, and these eyes which "now behold the sun and the moon, and the "heavens in all their glory, which now are de-"lighted with the various beauties which shine "in the face of nature, shall be closed in the "darkness and shadow of death; this heart shall "ere long cease to move, these hands and arms "shall forget their functions, and all the powers "and faculties of this body be reduced to a "state of inaction; then shall I sleep with the "clods of the valley, and the worms shall feed

"sweetly upon me, the grave shall shut her "mouth upon me, and I shall be as if I had ne-"ver been."

Secondly, death is a removal from this world, with all its businesses, pleasures, and troubles. Our existence in the world necessarily leads us to be engaged in a variety of employments, and to form a variety of connections and relations; by means of these, as being the constituents of our happiness, we contract a very ardent affection for this life and the things thereof, insomuch that a separation from them becomes as great a shock to nature as that which separates the soul from the body. For a proof of this, let me appeal to the experience of every human being. Is there any one now hearing me who does not acknowledge the tender name of parent or child, husband or wife, brother or friend? is there any one insensible to the calls of nature or affection? It is hardly possible—we are all united together as with bands of iron and brass, we are tied down to life by innumerable fetters, the breaking of which is painful to the uttermost, for in proportion to the degree of affection we bestow upon these, must be the pain of parting with them; this separation, however, sooner or later, must take place upon the approach of death. Lover and

friend must stand at a distance, and we must tread the dark valley alone; between us and our dearest enjoyments, the broad and dreadful gulf must be stretched out. The business and cares of life must then likewise cease. We are all now engaged in some certain pursuits to which all our views are directed; one is intent on making a fortune, another on raising and aggrandizing a family, a third on purchasing fame and reputation, while a fourth is contented to "rise up "early, and sit up late, to eat the bread of sor- "row and carefulness," to earn the common necessaries of life. At death, these likewise must cease, the business of life is finished, and an eternal farewell must be taken of what is now all our study and all our desire; but as a counterbalance to this, death likewise puts an end to the troubles of life—this state is a state of pain, and sorrow, and disappointment, one trial and distress following close upon the heels of another; no sooner are we relieved out of one misery, than another instantly comes in the place of it—but under all the ills of mortality, let us comfort ourselves in this, that they are but transitory; though the journey be painful and irksome, it cannot be lasting. Death will, ere long, bring us deliverance from all our miseries; the fury of the persecutor, the stings of poverty, the racking of pain,

the malice, contempt, and ill-will of the world can pursue us no farther than the grave; there "the wicked cease from troubling, and there the "weary be at rest; there the prisoners rest toge-"ther, they hear not the voice of the oppressor." In the

Third place, death is the commencement of an eternal state. It is this consideration that clothes death in all its awe and terror—it is not the resigning our breath, it is not the being for ever insensible, it is not the parting with life and its enjoyments, the separation from friends and relations, that denominates this period of our existence the "king of terrors;" no, it is on account of the awful change it makes in our being, on account of the awful consequences it is attended with, that it is to be dreaded. What must be the situation of the soul in that dread moment, when it is ushered into the presence of the Almighty God, now no more seen "darkly as "through a glass," but displayed in all the awful majesty of his attributes and perfections, seated on a throne of judgment, and ready to pronounce an irreversible doom which is to adjudge to eternal happiness or misery? As all mankind are divided into two general classes, the righteous and the wicked, accordingly will they be disposed of

in another world—and according as each of us is possessed of either of these characters, will be the sentence then pronounced upon us, "come ye "blessed," or "depart ye cursed;" from which will arise the eternal distinction between every individual of the human race—to either the one or the other of these classes we must every one of us belong, and our departed souls be received by the Judge either with smiles of love and approbation, and put in possession of all the treasures of immortality, of that "incorruptible and "undefiled inheritance" which the Father hath prepared and the Redeemer purchased; or else with frowns of wrath and fiery indignation, driven into that "everlasting fire which is prepared for "the devil and his angels." The consideration that death fixes our eternal state, is in its own nature so deeply interesting, that it ought to be matter of surprise that we should lose sight of it for a moment, or spend a thought on any thing else. Were we but duly impressed with the worth of our own souls, and the vast import of the word eternity, our lives would undoubtedly be employed in a different manner; which leads me to consider in the

Second place, the practical use we ought to make of these considerations—it is, in one

word, to live good lives: the only security against the sting of death, is a life passed in the fear of God, "a conscience void of offence "towards God and towards man:"—but, alas, where is the person possessed of this, who has not the highest reason to be exceedingly afraid, and to tremble at the prospect of appearing before the tribunal of an infinitely holy and just God, with all the imperfections, all the weaknesses, all the failings he needs must be conscious of, who could stand in that day were justice to be administered with strict severity? But blessed be God, that we have a "city of refuge" to fly unto, in which we can be in perfect safety from the avenger of blood; that Christ has by his death triumphed over death and hell, nailing them to his cross, and thereby has disarmed this formidable enemy of all his terrors—the christian then can encounter death as a vanquished foe, and can with confidence and satisfaction meet his Judge, having changed "the filthy rags of his "own righteousness" for the perfect and unspotted robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, and having left all his sins, and infirmities, and pollutions on the other side the grave. But God forbid that we should "continue in sin because "grace doth abound." God forbid that we should be evil and unthankful because he is good

and long suffering—shall we so requite the Lord, foolish and unwise as we are?—no; let this rather be an argument with us to double our diligence, to "make our calling and election sure," by living as those whom Christ has redeemed by his blood; and in the view of death, and that awful appearance we must all soon make before the impartial tribunal of the great God, let us "work "out our salvation with fear and trembling"—and for our assistance herein, the following rule may be of considerable use; namely, to omit no duty we should be afraid to be overtaken in the neglect of by death, and to engage in no course or action, however specious an appearance it may assume, which our conscience whispers might prove dangerous or fatal to us if surprised in by the king of terrors. It would cost very little trouble to put this rule constantly in practice, and the effect it would naturally have upon our conduct and behaviour is too obvious to need any illustration; did we attend to it, how many follies and vices might we avoid, into which we are unthinkingly betrayed, presuming on their innocence, or at least indifference, but which the mirror of death would reflect in their true and proper colours. I shall mention two or three particular lessons in which this subject is peculiarly calculated to instruct us.—In the

First place, the prospect of death will naturally lead us to put the proper value upon time—the complaint of the shortness of life is universal; the rapidity of time is equally regretted by all, and yet, strange absurdity! we are as prodigal of it, as if it were never to have an end; if we observe the actions and pursuits of men, they appear to be secured of the endless existence of this world and the things thereof; if we examine into their sentiments they are obliged to confess that "all is vanity:" but were we but duly impressed with the certainty of death, with the peculiar concern we ourselves have in it, we could not surely waste so profusely the precious hours granted us to prepare for eternity. But here lies the grand error; we are ready enough to allow the truth of the proposition in general, that death is certain and universal; but, out of a blind and foolish partiality to ourselves, we act as if we had some secret hopes of being exempt from the universal law: but as cool reflection must tell us that this is the height of madness, let us improve every moment of our time to the great purposes for which it is given us, as having a reference to our eternal state. Let us "part with no moment "but in purchase of its worth," and if we think *the present life short*, the less reason have we to bestow any portion of it upon the purposes of

vanity, much less still upon those of vice and wickedness. The

Second lesson that the view of death is peculiarly calculated to instruct us in is humility.—Pride is a quality very unbecoming man, in whatever light we view him—at his best state he is but a weak, a dependant creature, and in many respects inferior even to some of the lower part of the creation. How humiliating, then, the prospect of being soon stripped of even the little we possess; whether superior qualifications of mind or body, high birth, the abundance of worldly riches, or extraordinary influence and authority—in the grave all are on a level. The beautiful and the deformed, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, the noble and the ignoble, the king and the beggar—the only distinction then will arise from superior piety and virtue. Surely pride is not for man; man, that must say "to corruption, thou art my fa-"ther, and to the worm, thou art my sister and "my mother"—that must soon lay all his glory in the dust, and be reduced to a condition nothing superior to the earth he treads on. Let us then divest ourselves of that hateful and hurtful disposition of mind, which cast the devil out of heaven, and which is every way so unsuitable to

our condition both as creatures and as sinners, and let us be clothed with "humility which is "an ornament in the sight of God of great price "—not thinking of ourselves more highly than "we ought to think, but with sobriety," as being sinful and mortal creatures. In the

Third place, this subject will teach us to be less eager in the pursuit of worldly objects, for the sake of which we are foolish enough to neglect our eternal concerns. Is it not strange and unaccountable that we should, with such indefatigable diligence, pursue toys and vanities, which reason and experience assure us are incapable of yielding any solid satisfaction, and to these sacrifice our immortal souls, risk eternal damnation, and defy Omnipotence? Though our course through life is surrounded on all sides with monuments of mortality, though death in one form or other stares us daily in the face, and though we have no security against his power, we still proceed in the same mad career, and impetuously pursue our course of vanity—but when we come to view ourselves in the light of dying creatures, these things will put on a very different appearance. We will no longer look upon riches, and honours, and sensual pleasure as the chief good, and as such place our affections upon them; no,

it will then be the language of our heart, "what "shall it profit me though I should gain the "whole world, and lose my soul; or what equiva-"lent shall I receive in exchange for my soul?" Further, in the

Fourth place, the thought of death will teach us moderation in the use even of things lawful; we will not then permit ourselves to be intoxicated with worldly happiness, nor allow transitory objects to take intire possession of our hearts—it is no less criminal to indulge ourselves to an immoderate degree in the use of enjoyments in their own nature lawful, than to be guilty of what is really unlawful; and if we reflect on the pangs that must rend the heart when it is torn from what it loves, we shall see the danger of setting our affections so strongly on any object whatever, as to cause so sensible a pain to us when the parting hour comes. We should then "buy as though "we bought not, possess as though we possessed "not, use this world as not abusing it, seeing "this world and the fashion thereof fast hasteth "away." And in the

Last place, it will, in this view, be our principal study to procure an interest in the favour of God. This is the only thing which death cannot take

from us, this alone will support us when life and its enjoyments are at an end; to this we are indebted for the glorious hope that "this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and that this "mortal shall put on immortality;" through this we are raised to "the hope of an inheritance that "is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth "not away." Let us, therefore, "continue stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the "work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. "Amen."

SERMON XXXIV.

JEREMIAH l. 4—5.

In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God.

They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.

THE CHRISTIAN TRAVELLER TOWARDS ZION*.

WERE I to ask any one in this great assembly what was the ultimate object of his hopes and his desires, I am persuaded none would make any hesitation to answer, a happy immortality: every body wishes, nay, in a certain degree expects, to go to heaven, that is, to enjoy a state of happiness beyond death and the grave: how much then is it to be regretted that multitudes should be so unhappy as to mistake the road: if

* This was Dr. Hunter's first Sermon after he was admitted into South Leith church, and was preached on the 10th of January, 1760.

I knew but of one in all my audience who was so cruel to himself as obstinately to persist in the broad way that leadeth to destruction, I should feel prompted by the combined force of duty, of affection, of compassion, to go to such a person, and beseech him upon my bended knees to take pity upon himself; I should gladly incur his displeasure, his resentment, if, by any expression of earnestness and regard, I could but persuade him to think seriously what he is doing, and whither he is going: but, alas! why do I speak of one? it is no breach of charity to express an apprehension that many, that numbers, instead of seeking the way to heaven "with their faces thi-"therwards," are madly, unthinkingly, hurrying on to endless misery; and under that apprehension, how do I find myself at a loss to address this assembly! I would fain suppose, and for the present shall take it for granted, that all now hearing me, of whom perhaps there is a goodly number brought hither merely from a curiosity natural upon occasions of this sort, mean and wish to be happy, and God of his infinite mercy forbid that there should be one lost soul within these walls; for your instruction then, allow me to turn the prophecy in my text, which primarily refers to the redemption of the Jewish nation from bondage, into an exhortation suited to our

particular circumstances. "Come, and let us," who live in these happy days of gospel light and knowledge, "go together weeping" and making supplication, "and seek the Lord our God;" let us "ask the way to Zion with our faces thither-"ward, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in "a perpetual covenant, that shall not be for-"gotten."

I shall not, in farther discoursing from this passage of holy writ, confine myself to a method, but just offer a few observations as they occur from the words, and

First, I would observe the beautiful resemblance between the christian proceeding on his way heavenwards, and one travelling on a journey. The motive which commonly engages any one to undertake a journey, is either uneasiness at home, some pleasure and advantage to be received at the end of his course, or both these together; and this is exactly the case in the christian life: men never think of entering on "the "narrow way that leadeth unto life," till they begin to feel that all is not well at home, till they begin to apprehend the danger of continuing in sin. They who live in ease and affluence, who are unacquainted with misery, who

never experienced disappointment, are, of all others, the most backward to enter upon a course which is necessarily attended with mortification and self-denial; they endeavour, therefore, to lull conscience asleep, that they may enjoy their pleasures in quiet. Our blessed Lord gives us a representation as a proof of this, in the example of the man whose "grounds brought forth plen-"tifully," who possessed a superfluity of worldly enjoyments; lost in these, we find him thus holding discourse with himself: "Soul, thou hast "much goods laid up for many years, take thine "ease, eat, drink, and be merry;" to such a person, what a thunder-clap must have been the dreadful sentence: "thou fool, this night shall "thy soul be required of thee." If any such are now hearing me, I would wish to give the alarm in time; up, and be doing, say not to yourselves "Peace, peace, when there is no peace;" for God's sake, and as you love your own souls, stifle not the remonstrances of conscience when it endeavours to rouse you out of an unthinking state. Were you assured that your dwelling was to be set on fire over your head if you continued in it a day longer, you would not deliberate whether or not it was expedient for you to leave it immediately; and can you live in sin at the constant risk of being cut off in the midst of your

career, and hurried away to " dwell with devour-
" ing fire?" Those likewise who are addicted to any one particular vicious habit, who are subject to the power of some domineering lust, so long as they can indulge in it, can seldom come to the resolution of entering upon a course which positively requires them to forego their favourite passion, to " lay aside the sin which so easily besets " them;" and, in general, all are backward with regard to religion till they hear the thunder of the law denounced, and conscience applying the denunciation in the words of the prophet, " Thou " art the man;" then as one who seeing nothing but misery and distress in remaining at home, resolves to change the scene in order to amend his fortune, so is the awakened convinced sinner driven out of his strong hold, constrained to " fly " from the wrath to come;" then his inquiry is, " What shall I do to be saved? Wretched man " that I am, who shall deliver me from the body " of this death?" But then the difficulties of the journey itself are many and great, supposing the sinner fairly entered upon it; assaults from without, suggestions from within, many duties to perform, many pleasures to be given up, many mortifications to be undergone; hence many resolutions to give up the cause, to return back to the world, to return back to sin, to bid adieu to hea-

ven; but the certain misery of a final relapse startles and terrifies the soul; the great all is at stake; to return is inevitable destruction, to go forward is certain happiness; persevere or be miserable. Then as one who, unsuccessful in his scheme of life, tries various methods, and adopts different plans in the hope of retrieving his circumstances, so the perplexed distressed soul flies to every quarter for relief, "seeking rest, and find-"ing none." What can he do, how shall he escape? In the creatures he finds no comfort, no assistance; he resolves, at last, to cast himself wholly upon the mercy of God in Christ as his ultimate refuge; he determines seriously and resolutely to pursue the christian course; as he advances the motive of conduct changes, fear subsides, hope springs up in the soul, the glorious prize is placed full in view, the rich reward which he is to receive at the end of the painful and wearisome journey, and which is sufficient greatly to overpay all the toil and fatigue he may undergo in the prosecution of it. This leads me to a

Second observation with regard to the travellers in this journey: they "*ask* the way to Zion;" they are careful and diligent in seeking after the means of spiritual edification and comfort; one who has been so unhappy as to mistake his road,

upon finding himself bewildered, is very anxious and earnest in his inquiries of every one he meets how he may extricate himself; and it is for the sake of wandering bewildered Zion travellers that God has been pleased to establish a standing ministry in the world; a set of men obliged by precept, and more so by example, to go before his people, saying, "this is the way, walk ye in "it," to warn sinners of their danger and misery, to reclaim those who "wander, and are out of "the way," to "turn the wicked from the evil "of their way," after the example of their great Master, of whom it was foretold that he should "preach good tidings unto the meek, bind up "the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to the "captives, and the opening of the prison to them "that are bound." But I proceed to observe,

Thirdly, that they "ask the way to Zion "with their faces thitherward." The direction of a man's face toward any place, is an expression which, in common language, denotes an eager desire, a stedfast expectation of an object. One travelling on a journey, at the end of which he promises himself some signal pleasure, has his thoughts principally employed about it, is uneasy, is restless till he get forward to the possession of it grudges even the necessary interruptions for

repose and refreshment, and every moment anticipates the coming bliss: in like manner, he who by the eye of faith is enabled to survey that great and "exceeding weight of glory," which is "the end of his faith, even the salvation of his "soul," conceives with the apostle, "a desire to "depart, and to be with Christ," which is best of all, and is constantly "reaching towards the "mark, for the prize of the high calling of God "in Christ Jesus;" the objects of time and sense will endeavour in vain to call off his attention; he sees vanity in legible characters stamped upon every sublunary enjoyment; his heart and affections are fixed upon "a more enduring sub-"stance," compared to which, the riches, the honours, the pleasures of this world, are as "dust "upon the scale, and as the small dust upon the "balance:" no wonder then, if the faces of the travellers to Zion are continually set upon this "great recompence of reward." This suggests to us another useful observation, which may serve as a test of their pursuing in reality the way to Zion, namely, that their faces be constantly set thitherwards. We can scarcely believe that person in earnest in his inquiries after the heavenly country, who is perpetually making digressions into the world, whose daily practice shews him to be eager in the pursuit of wealth, of fame, of power,

of pleasure: no, the traveller to Zion must learn to "crucify the flesh, with the affections and "lusts thereof;" must learn to "deny himself, "take up the cross, and follow Jesus," whithersoever he goes, through good, and through bad report, through honour and dishonour, through life and through death; he must rise with a holy contempt above both the threatenings and the allurements of the world, and say with the apostle, "None of these things move me, neither count I "my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish "my course with joy." But not to dwell longer on this part of the subject: whoever wishes to see the whole christian life wrought into the most beautiful and expressive allegory, under this similitude of a journey, may see it in a book, which witlings may despise and ridicule, but which every body of true taste and real piety must admire with all its imperfections; I mean that well known performance of an illiterate man, the Pilgrim's Progress.

I proceed to another observation arising from the words of my text, namely, the wonderful effects of real religion in cementing the hearts of men one to another. Between the children of Israel and the children of Judah there was, at that time, a rooted, a national aversion, which was carried

to the utmost extreme of rancour; but when they return to a sense of their duty to God, they are represented likewise as returning to a sense of their duty to one another: "In those days, "the children of Israel shall come, they and the "children of Judah together, going and weeping, "they shall go and seek the Lord their God;" every personal, every private, every national animosity is lost and swallowed up in mutual forbearance and forgiveness, which are the true badge of religion. What a noble and important lesson to christians! It was an excellent advice of good old Jacob to his jarring, discordant children, when he was sending them into Egypt upon an errand which concerned their common cause: "See that ye fall not out by the way." Do we profess to be the followers of Jesus, members of that body whereof he is the head, children of the same common Father, candidates together for the same heavenly inheritance? do we come together so often to worship God with one heart and soul? for God's sake let us act consistently with ourselves, and not bring dishonour upon our profession, by indulging envy, malice, hatred, ill will against one another; as we come together to worship God under one roof, let us love one another with one heart; let the great law of charity ever be the rule of our conduct: "All things

" whatsoever ye would that men should do to " you, do ye even so to them." Above all things let us avoid rashly judging or condemning our fellow christians on account of differences in sentiment and opinion; but let all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth be ever the objects of our love and esteem. Again, it is of importance to observe the temper of mind of these Zion travellers; they are represented as " going and weeping;" there is a " godly sor- " row which worketh repentance;" they who really set their faces heavenwards will meet with much cause of weeping; they will deplore their former sinful sinning state; they will deplore their present imperfection, the remainders of corruption which still cleave fast to them; they will deplore the slowness of their progress in the christian life; they will deplore the misery of a " world " lying in wickedness;" the thoughtlessness, the insensibility of those they are among, perhaps of those they hold most dear. In a word, the true christian can never want occasion of sorrow, in a greater or less degree, so long as he continues in his state of pilgrimage here below; but " they " that sow in tears, shall reap in joy; he that " goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, " shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, " bringing his sheaves with him." Last of all, let

me observe to you, the noble resolution of these travellers of Zion: "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that "shall not be forgotten," as a pattern for our imitation. I would gladly suppose that there are none now hearing me who are madly resolved to live and die in the avowed contempt of God and religion; but there is a set of stupid unthinking creatures, who never trouble themselves about those things which concern their everlasting peace, who go on from day to day, regardless of God, regardless of eternity, to which they are fast hastening, regardless of their precious and immortal souls. What can we say to such persons? they will not hear, they will not lay it to heart; we preach, we beseech in vain: all we can do is to go to a throne of grace on your behalf, and beseech the Father of mercies to have compassion on you, to melt down your hard flinty hearts to a sense of your sin, to a sense of your danger, to a sense of your duty, that you may return unto the Lord with weeping; that you may "seek the Lord your God;" that ye may "ask the way to Zion with your faces thitherward;" that ye may "join yourselves to the "Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be "forgotten." And as for you, my dear christian friends, who have already made choice of the good

way of the Lord, let me exhort you to "hold the "beginning of your confidence stedfast unto the "end;" you have "chosen that better part which "shall not be taken away from you;" let the glory and bliss which are to be revealed animate your conduct; you are working for eternity, be not dismayed with the irksomeness of your journey; it is but short, much of it is already past; and what comparison is there between the "light "afflictions which are but for a moment," and that "far more exceeding, and eternal weight of "glory," which is reserved in heaven for you. Still press towards Zion with your "faces thi-"therward," let not the objects which surround you call off your attention from your main pursuit; be not "afraid, for the terror by night, nor "for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the "pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for "the destruction that wasteth at noon day," for, "greater is he that is with you, than he that is "against you."

It will now, no doubt, be expected that I should apply what I have said, suitably to the present occasion. It has pleased a gracious and a wise Providence, my very dear friends, to establish between you and me a very near and important relation. I am sure, for my own part, I

feel it very strongly, and I have the utmost reason to believe that you are not wanting in your returns of affection; but when I look around this crowded house, when I consider the infinite value of so many dear, dear precious souls, when I consider the vast importance of such a trust, and when, on the other hand, I reflect upon my own youth, my own inexperience, my own weakness, my own failings and imperfections, I am ready to sink into nothing; I am ashamed to lift up my head. If the great apostle of the Gentiles, struck with the awful importance of his charge, was constrained to cry out:—"Who is sufficient for "these things?" in what terms shall I express my concern, my apprehension? At the same time it is my joy and rejoicing that the gracious Spirit of God still supports, strengthens, and assists. I have now the honour to bear the sacred and important character of a minister of Christ, and I trust in my great master's assurance when he instituted a gospel ministry, "Lo, I am with you "alway, even to the end of the world." It is my peculiar happiness to enter upon my charge with the good will and the good wishes of all concerned; at least, I have the best ground to think so; it would damp my pleasure very considerably if I had reason to think otherwise. Ever since I turned my serious thoughts to this sacred office,

it has been my earnest desire and prayer to God that I might be useful to mankind in general, and possess the affections of those among whom I was to labour in particular, as thereby alone I apprehended, I could be of any service to them; and it has graciously pleased my God to gratify my hopes, my desires, my ambition; yes, I will say my ambition, as I can safely appeal to the Searcher of Hearts, that the love of my people I greatly prefer to every object of gain or advancement. I have had the pleasure of preaching among you for a considerable time past, how successfully, God and yourselves best know; if I may judge from the numberless testimonies of affection and friendship which I have received, both in public and from individuals, I have the utmost reason to be satisfied; your very singular attachment to me loudly calls for the warmest and most grateful returns: the best return I can make, is to devote myself wholly to your good; this I hope will be my constant aim; the continuance of your affection will complete my happiness; perhaps I can hardly expect it to be continued in the same degree: a very near connection has frequently been found fatal to love: what is actually in our possession, comes by little and little to lose its value—but as our connection is, I trust, built upon the most solid foundation,

upon mutual affection, upon a mutual desire of each other's comfort and happiness, allow me to hope that our comfort and happiness will be lasting: I hope, at least, that, through grace, my conduct will be such as to screen me from contempt and reproach: "My heart's desire and "prayer to God for you shall be, that ye may be "saved." To this great end shall all my labours be directed; to contribute to this, I hope God will enable me to "preach the word, be instant "in season, out of season," to "reprove, rebuke, "exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine;" but allow me to remind you, my dear friends, that without your own concurrence, preaching, and exhortation, and remonstrance, and reproof will be in vain; in the salvation of your immortal souls you yourselves are the most nearly concerned. "Work out," therefore, "your own "salvation with fear and trembling," for let me add, "it is God which worketh in you to will and "to do of his good pleasure;" without his powerful aid and blessing, your endeavours and mine will be altogether fruitless: that divine blessing, therefore, let us with one heart and one voice daily, constantly implore, for it alone "maketh "rich, and addeth no sorrow therewith."

I shall conclude my discourse with one consi-

sideration more, and a very awful one it is, namely, that the day is fast approaching, when you, and I, and all of us, shall "stand before the "judgment seat of Christ," to answer for the improvement of our talents, our advantages, and our opportunities. We are now assembled in a very solemn manner, in the presence of Almighty God, who knows perfectly the ends at which we aim, but ere long we shall all be reassembled in a more august and solemn manner in the more immediate presence of God; and how delightful will it be in that day to become each other's "crown and joy." Let me indulge the thought: think, my dear friends, think of the inexpressible happiness of meeting again beyond death and the grave, glorious and immortal; when we shall have heaven itself for our place of worship, and angels, the sons of light, for the partakers of our bliss; when we shall join together in a more exalted strain than even they can raise, and sing "unto him that loved us, and washed us from "our sins, and hath made us kings and priests "unto God and his Father; to him be glory and "dominion for ever and ever:" when we shall, to all eternity, bless the happy day which first brought us together. But how shocking the contrary prospect! I will not present you with it, as I would not chuse, at this time, to send you

away with any damp upon your spirits; but let me intreat you to think of these things, and this will naturally lead all of us to preach and pray, and hear and practise, as for eternity. "And now, "may the very God of peace" bless every one of us "with all spiritual and heavenly blessings in "Christ Jesus," and carry us on together, by every method of grace and providence, till we all arrive at last unto "the measure of the stature of "the fulness of Christ," and "to the king eter- "nal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, "be honour and glory, for ever and ever. "Amen."

FUNERAL PIECES.

DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF AN INFANT.

THAT sovereign will, which all in heaven and on earth must obey, has brought us hither to mourn over the grave of one of the sweetest and pleasantest of babes whom parental love ever cherished—by fell disease snatched away—nipped in the bud of life—leaving behind him only the sadly sweet remembrance of infant innocence, and the heart-touching expression of rationality emerging into the consciousness of itself. But the remembrance of the dear infant, however mournful, is unaccompanied with horror—his short period of existence past furnishes nothing to excite remorse, aversion, disgust; no instance of impiety, of profligacy, of perverseness, to raise anxiety, or kindle abhorrence. Nothing do we know of him, or of that great and glorious Being who has seen meet to call him, as we may

apprehend, thus prematurely away; but what encourages us to hope and to believe that his better, his immortal part now reposes in the bosom of his father and his God; that while we weep, the tender, prattling, helpless child—the spirit of the man made perfect, expatiates in all the extent of reason, and triumphs in the fulness of joy, unallayed even by the sorrow which melts the hearts of surviving relations. In this faith—we cast this little corruptible seed into the earth—it dies—but to be quickened; it is dissolved, only to arise more glorious—it yields to the death-denouncing decree, that it may awake to immortality. Our eyes shall no more behold the delicate, brittle clay; but through the grace that is in Jesus Christ, we have no uncertain hope of seeing from its ashes arise "a body fashioned like to Christ's "glorious body," of joining the sweet little friend who has gone before us, and of shining with him in our Saviour's likeness—and in this faith, therefore, we triumph and say: "O death! where is "thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of "sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which "giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus "Chirst."

DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF A YOUNG MAN.

THE irresistible summons of an all-ruling Providence has called us together, this day, to perform the last offices of humanity to a dear departed friend and brother. Here we have deposited, and here we must leave, in the certain prospect of speedily following, all that could die of a valuable and excellent young man—whom it has pleased Almighty God to take away in the very flower of his age, from his family, whose happiness he constituted—from parents, to whom he was an honour—from friends, whose esteem he had gained and preserved, by the virtues of a warm, affectionate, and sympathising heart, and a ready disposition to do all the good in his power—from a christian society, of which he was a steady, useful, and respectable member—and from a world, which he instructed by an example of singular piety, at an age when so many disgrace it by their vices. We have seen him, with concern, declining for many months past; but he had not delayed the important and difficult work of death, till the languishments of disease, and the forerunner of dissolution overtook him. No,

the hours of health, of vigour, of unimpaired reason, of blooming youth were devoted to God, to religion, to the "one thing needful," to that eternity which has now swallowed up his span of life. The pains which shattered, which pulled down, and which at length destroyed his body, were all the pains he felt. The remorse following a neglected day of grace, the pangs of a roused and despairing conscience, the horrors of a wounded spirit, his heavenly Father suffered him not to taste. That part of him, therefore, which mortality could not reach, we have good hope, through grace, now reposes in the breast of his Father and his God, through the merits of his Saviour. When we think of such a happy transition we ought to rejoice, not to grieve on his account. He is now above all the little things which once disquieted him, and which still trouble us—he has now rejoined his beloved departed pastor, whose ashes slumber hard by, and triumphs with him in that salvation which he preached, and which they together believed, embraced, waited for, and now possess. From them, whose glory and felicity we cannot now reach, even in thought, let me turn to you, my dear mortal friends, and beseech you by the tender mercies of God, to "redeem the time—to work out your "own salvation with fear and trembling," to be

" followers of them, who, through faith and pa-
" tience, are now inheriting the promises—" to
" do all diligence to make your calling and elec-
" tion sure—" to seek peace with God, through Jesus Christ, before your " feet stumble upon the " dark mountains." Believe me, you will never repent your having begun to serve God early, or continued in his work and service zealously and faithfully; but it will be a certain source of inexpressible woe, if disease and death overtake you at a distance from God, in a state of enmity against him; there is but one way of dying comfortably, and that is dying in the faith of the gospel, united to, and relying upon Christ the Lord, the conqueror of death, the bruiser of the serpent's head, the fountain of life, the quickener of all things:—Who " was dead, and is " alive again, and who liveth for evermore. Be ye " therefore stedfast, unmoveable, always abound-
" ing in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye " know that your labour is not in vain in the " Lord."—" This corruptible must put on incor-
" ruption; this mortal must put on immortality;
" then shall be brought to pass the saying that " is written, death is swallowed up of victory.
" The Lord himself shall descend from heaven " with a shout, with the voice of the archangel,
" and with the trump of God; and the dead in

" Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive
" and remain shall be caught up together with
" them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,
" and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Where-
" fore comfort one another with these words."

DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF A MAN WHO DIED SUDDENLY.

BEHOLD, my dear fellow mortals, how the grim king of terrors again stares us in the face! Hark! the voice of the Eternal again pierces our trembling ear—it resounds from tomb to tomb—O man! " dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt " return."—The little space betwixt our feet and that grave is not more inconsiderable than the few fleeting moments which divide between us and eternity. The endearing ties of nature and blood, of sympathy, of humanity, of friendship, have brought us hither to day to perform their last sad duties; to pay in advance those offices of tenderness which shall, in our turn, be repaid to us by our surviving friends. You, my friends, who are acquainted with the distressing circumstances of this mournful event, and are interested in it, have that within you which will supply the place

of every monitor; your hearts will for many days address you in a language infinitely more forcible than that of my tongue. As for you, who are strangers, if you possess the common feelings of humanity, surely it must be affecting, it must be alarming, to be told of one cut off in the very prime of life; torn from an affectionate consort, who was just ready to make him the glad father of another endearing pledge of conjugal love; from an infant race, to whom his life was of the utmost importance; from a society of relations and friends, to whom the most engaging qualities of a kind and benevolent heart, and of an open, frank, and generous disposition, had rendered justly dear. Cut off, without warning given, from well grounded reasonable hopes, and rational solid enjoyments. You hear of one, men and brethren, who, fourteen days ago, arose in as good health, and with as fair a prospect of long life and felicity, as the healthiest and happiest among you. But it has pleased Him who is the fountain of life, and the dread arbiter of death, to send his all-commanding summons, and to hurry him away—and nothing is left us but to mourn, to adore, to submit: to sympathize with, to comfort, to protect, and assist the widow and the orphan, and with all diligence, and earnestness, and anxiety, to prepare for our own latter end. Our

departed friend, whose ashes we here deposit, is now far beyond the praise and contempt of his fellow worms—and we humbly trust, through the mercy of God, and the merits of Jesus, has passed through death to life eternal. We shall go to him, but he cannot return to us. Let not, therefore, either the speaker or the hearers put this awful scene far from them, for I am speaking to those who, ere long, will hear that awful sentence: "To thee time shall be no more." Oh, my beloved friends, "there is no knowledge, nor "wisdom, nor device in the grave," to which we are fast hastening; "the night cometh when "no man can work," the earth will open her mouth to receive us, "the worm will feed sweetly "upon us," we shall be as though we had not been; we shall slumber in the dust, "careless of "the voice of the morning;" but we "know "that our Redeemer liveth, and that he shall "stand at the latter day upon the earth; and "though after our skin worms destroy these bo-"dies, yet in our flesh we shall see God." Listen to the words of our all-gracious Saviour. "In "my father's house are many mansions, I go to "prepare a place for you, that where I am, there "ye may be also." Blessed Jesus, through thee, sin, death, and hell are vanquished foes. "With "thee is the fountain of life, in thy light shall we

" see light; though I walk through the dark val-
" ley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for
" thou art with me; in thy presence there is ful-
" ness of joy; at thy right hand there are plea-
" sures for evermore."

DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF A FRIEND.

THE voice of the Eternal saith, " Cry. What
" shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the good-
" liness thereof is as the flower of the field." The voice from that tomb is loud and distinct, and quick and powerful: it says, in a language intelligible to all men, Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. It says, " O man! thou hast here no abiding city:
" set thy desire on a better country, that is, an
" heavenly. Be ye also ready, for ye know neither
" the day nor the hour when the Son of man
" cometh." Could the spirit of our departed friend return, and reanimate the clay tabernacle, and bring a report from the regions of eternal day, what would the testimony be? Once I reckoned, now I know, that the sufferings of time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. Mourn not, my friends, for me; but mourn for yourselves, left as you are to struggle for a season through a valley of tears. Your kind wishes and prayers in my behalf are infinitely exceeded.

You wished me release from pain and suffering, and it is accomplished; I suffer no more, I am in pain no more. You wished me prolonged life in the waste howling wilderness which you inhabit, and lo, God has done inconceivably more and better for me—I now live, and enjoy life in the midst of the paradise of God. You wished me temporal comfort and prosperity; it was not the will of my heavenly Father that these should be mine any longer; but he has bestowed on me in exchange " a far more exceeding and eternal " weight of glory," which I would not re-exchange for all " the kingdoms of this world and the glory " of them." With sympathy and sorrow, such as immortals feel, my spirit looks down on the conflict which ye have still to endure, on the days of darkness which must still pass over you. But be not dismayed. " Be strong in the Lord, and the " power of his might. Be faithful unto death, and " ye shall receive a crown of life." Live the life of faith upon the Son of God, and your latter end shall be peace.

Listen, my christian friends, to the celestial monitor, and learn to live, learn to die. This awful spot acquires a growing interest with us every day. It is peopled with our kindred, our friends, with whom we took sweet counsel. They invite

us to repose with them, and they rest in hope. Death has, henceforward, nothing formidable to the believer in Christ Jesus. "In the tomb of "Jesus Christ, are dissipated all the terrors which "the tomb of nature presents; in the tomb of "nature, O sinner, thou beholdest thy frailty, thy "subjection to the bondage of corruption: in "the tomb of Jesus Christ, thou beholdest thy "strength and thy deliverance. In the tomb of "nature, the punishment of sin stares thee in the "face; in the tomb of Jesus Christ, thou findest "the expiation of it. From the tomb of nature "thou hearest the dreadful sentence pronounced "against all the posterity of Adam, 'Dust thou "art, and to dust shalt thou return:' but from "the tomb of Jesus Christ issue these accents of "consolation: 'I am the resurrection and the "life; he that believeth in me, though he were "dead, yet shall he live.' In the tomb of nature "thou readest this universal, this irrevocable "doom written: 'It is appointed unto men once "to die:' but in the tomb of Jesus Christ, thy "tongue is loosened into this triumphant song "of praise: 'Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh "grave, where is thy victory?" Thanks be to "God who giveth us the victory, through our "Lord Jesus Christ*."

* Saurin on the Crucifixion.

DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF A FRIEND.

ONCE more, my friends, the awful and affecting "voice" is heard "in the wilderness," crying from grave to grave, from heap to heap, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof "is as the flower of the field." Once more our feet tremble upon the brink of a friend and a brother's grave: his feet have stumbled upon the dark mountains; he is fallen asleep, is laid low, and shall not arise "till the heavens be no more," and can we be deaf and blind, can we be unmoved and insensible when such an object is presented to our view? "The word is brought nigh "us" when it presses thus hard upon our reason, upon our consciences, upon our feelings.

And have we need, my fellow mortals, of such a loud and alarming monitor as this? or having him, can we but be serious and attentive? Thoughtless, stupid creatures that we are, and must our nearest and best friends die before our eyes in order to remind us that our latter end too is at hand? and can we forget that we must, ere long, serve in our turn as a warning to others,

that "all flesh is grass," that "dust we are, and to dust we must return."

What is thy state and character, Oh man, whoever thou art, that lookest down into this grave? Art thou possessed of a healthful and vigorous constitution? so, till of late days was our departed brother: art thou diligent and faithful in business? so was he: art thou a dutiful relation and an affectionate friend? such was he: art thou a regular and constant worshipper of God? so was he: art thou a believer in, and a lover of Jesus Christ? such we trust also was he: but none of these things could stay the hand of the summoning angel, none of these things could reverse the immutable decree; he is gone before, and thou must quickly follow.

This is a lesson inculcated upon us not by this and the other instructor, at this and another season; but every instant that we exist, and by the combined and forcible voice of universal nature and Providence, by the simplest and most obvious reflections of our own minds, and by the uniform and pointed declarations of eternal truth and wisdom. It were superfluous surely, therefore, to labour a proof of what is so evident, but we need often to be reminded that it is one

thing to assent to a truth, and another thing practically to believe it; that in vain are our heads enlightened, if our hearts remain unaffected and unreformed; that whatever increases the neglect of preparation for death, is worse than foreign to the business of life.

I have spoken to you, my dear friends, as men, as dying creatures; but I cannot forbear addressing a few words to you as christians, as believers of a resurrection of the dead, as expectants of a blessed immortality: "You know in whom you "have believed, and are persuaded that he is "able to keep what you have committed to him, "until that day;" Jesus hath said: "I am the "resurrection and the life, he that believeth in "me though he were dead, yet shall he live, "and he that liveth and believeth in me shall "never die."—"This is the Father's will which "hath sent me, that of all which he hath given "me I should lose nothing, but should raise it "up at the last day." In this view, our brother, whose ashes we here deposit, is only gone a little before us to our Father's house; our distance from him is only a thin veil of that flesh and blood, which we now wear, but which shall be soon drawn aside, and we shall behold one another again, and sit down together in the king-

dom of God; and the crowning day shall, at length, come, "When all that are in the "graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, "and shall come forth," when what "is sown in "corruption, shall be raised in incorruption," when what "is sown in dishonour, shall be raised "in glory," when that which "is sown in weak- "ness shall be raised in power," when that which "is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiri- "tual, an immortal body: He that testifieth "these things, saith, surely I come quickly. "Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus."

ADDRESS

TO THE

FRIENDLY FEMALE SOCIETY,

DELIVERED APRIL 7, 1802.

MY HIGHLY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

PERMIT me cordially to congratulate you on the progress which you have made in attempting an establishment which aims at providing permanent relief to the aged, infirm, helpless and diseased of your own sex; a design which reflects equal honour on the head which conceived it, and on the hearts which unite to promote it. It is of very inferior importance to ascertain with whom this gracious idea originated, and by whom it has been thus far supported. You are not, like ordinary females, contending for praise and pre-eminence, but have associated to "provoke each other," blessed contention, "to love and good works!" At a period, when the emulation, in some of what are called the higher circles of female society, is to display profuseness of expense, and giddiness of dissipation, when the columns of our public journals ostentatiously exhibit the brilliancy and waste of noc-

turnal revels, and when the solemnity of the Lord's Day is suspended, to make way for the more solemn and important pursuit of fashionable amusement; it is no slight consolation to reflect, that there is some counterbalance to female folly, existing in female good sense; that while so many smooth, and flattering, and patent highways conduct to the haunts of pleasure, there is at least one quiet sequestered path, that leads to the temple of Virtue; that while some high-born and high-bred dames are sinking time, health, and substance in unprofitable and ruinous luxury, Princesses and many ladies of exalted rank are uniting their exertions with yours, to wipe away the tear from the eye of misery, to administer a cordial to the drooping heart, to shelter the withering palsied limbs from the wintry blast, to smooth the pillow under the hoary head of deserted old age! Where could the hallowed design originate but with the compassionate Friend of the human race, who, in dying agony, provided a home and a protector for his desolate mother?

You have wisely taken the management of this great concern into your own hands. You stand in no need of male assistance. It is one of those domestic businesses in which it were indecent for men to interfere. You need no law to

regulate your conduct but the law of mercy to the miserable, and the law of kindness among yourselves. Other interests divide and separate, excite jealousy and kindle strife; this is a source of mutual endearment, a band of love. Other interests are limited to time, and expire with it; this looks into eternity, and bids defiance to death.

You have wisely stated the sum of your contribution toward the support of your humane Institution at a very moderate rate. It is desirable to have the countenance of greatness, and the munificence of wealth co-operating with you; but, next to God, you must look to number for solid and durable strength. From women like yourselves, and from women in still inferior situations, you must expect your chief supplies. The object needs but to be made known in order to obtain unbounded approbation and corresponding encouragement. From the lowness of the annual subscription, even persons in a servile condition will be induced to cast in their mite into the general stock, in the prospect of a late return, when the industry and thrift of youth

" ——— should be a foster-nurse;
" When service should in their old limbs lie lame,
" And unregarded age in corners thrown."

You must lay your account with opposition and discouragement; for where is the cause that has not been called to encounter difficulty and opposition, from the great cause of Christianity itself, down to the establishment of a petty parochial school? Objections will be started merely for the sake of objecting. Those who are unwilling to part with their money can easily find a pretence for withholding it, and yet think to save their credit. Some, as Brutus said of Cicero,

> " ——— Will never follow any thing
> " That other men begin."

Arm yourselves, therefore, with patience, with fortitude; " be not weary in well-doing; in due " season ye shall surely reap, if ye faint not." Hitherto ye have followed the impulse of a good and honest heart, and the dictates of a sound mind; as you proceed, the lessons of experience will assist you in modelling, improving, extending your original plan; for the designs of Deity alone are perfect from the first conception to the final execution, and even they, unfold themselves by degrees to the human understanding. Expect not too much, but exert yourselves as if your object were to be attained in its utmost latitude. Lay your account with having to encounter that

monster more hideous than witchcraft—ingratitude. Your good will be evil spoken of. There are persons whom it is impossible to serve. Your kindest intentions, your most beneficent actions, may be misinterpreted, misrepresented, condemned. Cruel reflection! humiliating view of human depravity! Your appeal must be to Him who searcheth the heart, to the testimony of a good conscience, and to the decision of that day, when the gift of a cup of cold water to cool the parched tongue shall be acknowledged of the sovereign Judge, not as constituting a plea of merit, but as an indication of love to the common Saviour of mankind. You labour not to be seen of men, not to attain the poor and perishable reward of the praise of mortals, but for the pleasure of doing good, but to fulfil, in your several spheres, the law of Christ. If this be your aim, you will assuredly reach it; and, like Solomon, obtain not only that which you sought, but that also which you sought not, the approbation of the wise and the good, and the grateful and affectionate returns of many whom you pitied and served. Dorcas was not rendered immortal by "the good "works and alms-deeds which she did;" but her memory was embalmed with the tears of the widows, who "shewed the coats and garments "which Dorcas made while she was with them;"

and she was miraculously restored to life, to enjoy one of the purest of human delights—a conviction that she was dear to the objects of her benignity.

I will not insult your understanding by insinuating a caution to guard the purity of your views against the slightest taint of party spirit. What have "The Friendly Female Society," and their liberal and enlarged purposes, to do with the illiberal and invidious distinctions of Churchman and Dissenter, of Presbyterian, Baptist and Independent? "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, "but ministers by whom ye believed?" One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are sisters. I have only to add my earnest prayer: That it may please God to inspire you with "the wis-"dom that is from above; which is first pure, "then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreat-"ed, full of mercy and good fruits, without par-"tiality and without hypocrisy!" And may "the peace of God, which passeth all under-"standing, keep your hearts and minds, through "Jesus Christ."

THE END.

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